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*"Peace be with me? Are ye
mocking me, rascals?"*

Chapter IX ~

THE WAYFARER'S LIBRARY

PILGRIMAGE



C. E. Lawrence



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TO

LADY GREGORY

IN GRATITUDE FOR HER

HELPFUL CANDOUR, ENCOURAGEMENT,

AND INESTIMABLE FRIENDSHIP.

939858

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FIRST EDITION	.	.	.	.	.	<i>May 1907</i>
REPRINTED	.	.	.	.	.	<i>August 1907</i>
SECOND EDITION	.	.	.	.	.	<i>July 1914</i>

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CHAPTER I

GENESIS

THERE was mist over Argovie on a mid-winter evening, scores on scores of years ago; a mist which made most of the habitants of the fortunate country who happened not to be within-doors, feel grey and wretched. The waning moon was lost in the clouds; no stars were visible; the night was raw and dark.

The bell at the monastery of the Holy Saint Dunstan rang curfew. Its gentle tones, floating over wet fields and solitary homesteads, reminded the folk who squatted by hearths or—early to bed—lay snugly awake among the rushes, of the brethren in the great ecclesiastical house who were then—for them and as ever—raising suppliant hands to God.

The call of the bell woke the winds, which sighed and strained; and then, as they gathered force, uncouthly sang.

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The mist and clouds were eventually blown away. The moon no longer hid a veiled face, but shone over the dark wet land, and with the stars made the night beautiful with a wasted beauty.

Two worn wayfarers—a man and a woman—toiled along a road of mire. It was heavy work wading through that rutted, flooded thoroughfare, and the man said so frequently. The woman who painfully followed him was generally silent, but now and then she ventured a protest. She was indeed in sorry case.

At last she sank by the side of the road, and leaned back against a bush, exhausted.

“On, you jade!” cried her companion, a rude fellow, an unemployed soldier, in tarnished semi-martial garments.

The woman shook her head despondently.

“On, on!” iterated the man, “this is no place of lodgment!”

With a great effort the poor creature rose, and clinging heavily to him, pulled herself painfully along. He bore the burden for some little time patiently; but then became suddenly impatient and shook her off. She leaned against a long, squat, wooden shed, fortunately there.

The discharged warrior, the same moment, caught sight of the monastery over the brow of the

Genesis

hill. The great gilt cross shone spectral in the moonlight.

“Ha!” he cried, a new hopeful note in his voice. “A house of religious! A candle to St. Joshua for that pretty picture! A weary man-at-arms, who has fought for his country and sweet religion, gets warmth and rest. If I can I will send for you; and, if I can’t, you can stay where you are, idle jade. Perhaps your legs will move more willingly on the morrow.”

Leaving his almost insensible companion without further word he strode sturdily to the place of assured hospitality.

After waiting in the cold and loneliness for a very long while, her pain growing every moment greater, the deserted woman became desperate. She rose and, groping along the weather-worn wooden wall, came to a door against which she pushed heavily, again and again. At last rotted fastenings gave way, she lurched into the building. It was quite dark. No moonlight penetrated there. But it was warmer and drier in that mysterious hostel than out in the world, and she did not fear the unseen creatures whose restlessness now and then rustled the straw.

She forgot her many diverse miseries in the greater pain.

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The voices of the winds grew louder, their song more discordant. Presently blended with them rose an infant's quavering cry.

Gradually—as the hours marched ghostily by—the winds grew quieter: the new-born mortal, also, ceased its plaint.

The mists rose once more from the marshes, hiding the stars. The clouds, emboldened, crept over the sky again, shrouding the moon, making the darkness of the earth complete. Then followed the silence of the night, the silence of sleep.

When Kelp the swineherd on the morrow went to pay the customary early visit to his charges, it was with no satisfaction that he saw the door of the great sty open. He was, in truth, sore afraid lest thieves or wolves had stolen or killed some of the swine. In that case there would be angry questioning from his monastic masters.

His anxiety was soon at rest. His practised eye ranging along the lines of sprawling monsters found all there and uninjured. Then, who or what had caused the breakage of the door?

He soon saw evidence that some one had been there in the night. There was in the filth more than one human footmark: he could see, too, from the freshness of the marks near the door that the intruder had not long since been gone. He

Genesis

went to the entrance and looked up and down the road; but there was no one in sight to break the loneliness of the misty morning.

Kelp ceased to speculate and busied himself with his menial duties. Suddenly he started, stood stiffly upright, and exclaimed:

“Mother o’ saints! what is here?”

An unusual sight for a pig-sty. Kelp scratched his hairy jaw in amazement, and knit his brows, perplexed. “Mercy o’ me!” cried he, “here’s very fine work for a winter night! Who put you there, poor brat?”

A new-born infant was lying in a nest of foul straw. A wretched little red mite he was, with lips pursed together and lead-coloured eyes blinking foolishly at a white line of sky which appeared through a chink in the ceiling. He was kept warm by a sow—a panting monster of flesh—which sprawled beside him; an odious beast, but, for the deserted weakling, a fortunate bed-fellow. The warmth of the swine’s body kept life in that of the child.

Kelp contemplated the infant for a few moments. Suddenly throwing into a corner the wooden rake he had been using, he hurried to the cottage in the hollow hard by to fetch Mause, his wife and work-fellow.

Though eagerness and excitement caused him

Pilgrimage

to fumble his words, he soon told her of the discovery.

The Samaritans entered the door of the great sty together. The babe was still lying quietly in his foul cradle, blinking foolishly at the ceiling streak of sky.

Mause uttered the woman's pitying cry.

"Some wastrel's whelp!" quoth the swineherd gruffly.

"A motherless babe!" said Mause, as tenderly raising the now whimpering foundling, she undid her own poor clothing, and snuggled him kindly in the warmth of her bosom.

So a hero—God save the word!—was born in Argovie; his first cradle, straw in a palace of pigs, the property of the monks of St. Dunstan. So the motherless offspring of worthless, feckless parents found a father and mother, who, though poor in world's wealth to the very extreme, were yet rich in heaven's wealth—kindness and charity.

Kelp's son, as the foundling came to be called, was christened Luke; and, as was meet for a child so severely tried at the beginning of life, he throve and prospered.

He lived heart and hand with Nature, and Nature loved him. Mause often asserted her belief that he was fairy's child.

Genesis

Soon after he was able to walk he went with Kelp to help in tending the swine, and accompanied them to the forests where they poked for food, or fed on the acorns which strewed the autumn avenues. While Kelp watched the pigs at their groping and sleeping, the little Luke played happily in childhood's holiday.

He came to know the truths of Nature as only one who has lived, morning, noon, and night, in the midst of her freedom, can know them. Flowers budded and bloomed, and Luke watched their history, till the petals faded, or fell in fruitfulness. He knew the particular notes of every bird which chirped, fluted, or sang; and had, through bread kindness, many a feathered friend, wild to everybody but him.

His very dear companions were the trees. For hours he would sit silent on a bough, watching the sunlight playing on the fluttering leaves, listening to the music of the wind among the branches, thinking—dreaming of the manifold wonders of the world. There was no mystery of the all-mysterious day which his little mind did not try to fathom. He was a true child, a persevering inquirer; an infant grandfather of science.

Especially did he love at the evening hour to clamber to some high tree-top to watch the sun set, and have wondering thoughts about that

Pilgrimage

strange other-world whereto the great, swelling, golden orb of life and luminance drifted for sleep.

Then when darkness had come, and the moon and stars were shining, his speculations still further increased in range. The stars were to him, in those early days, holes in the floor of heaven, the ceiling of the earth; the moon was a silver ship wherein angels were sailing. How he longed to be sailing with them in that shining vessel! Hours upon hours he spent staring at the stars, wishing he could peep within those tantalising, twinkling holes, and see God on His throne.

The child's only instructors were Brother Hilary, the bursar of the monastery, and Mause, his foster-mother. The chief instruction he received from them were in the dogmas and legends of the Church, accompanied with kindly chidings from the monk; and the more fantastic legends of the world, blended with the scoldings of an affectionate over-worked mother, from Mause.

This weird instruction fed the child's imagination, and prompted even wilder speculations and dreams. He was continually brooding over the problems of infant-theology, fitting the incomprehensible facts of life to the theories his untamed, unchallenged, childish imagination built from the fragments of religious truth supplied him by his teachers.

Genesis

Every natural fact held for him its especial supernatural meaning. He believed the clouds were smoke from the fires of hell; that a rainstorm was a flood of passionate tears brought from the place of sorrows on the bosom of the naughty clouds; that a rainbow was verily and truly an archway, along which souls marched from earth to heaven. Oh, how he longed to find the beginning of that archway, to tread the celestial way!

For ten untroubled years the simple, wise child lived with Kelp and Mause, and learnt the first lessons of life. Those ten years had no history.

Luke's life story practically began when little Alys, the tiny, yellow-haired daughter of Godfrey, chief huntsman to Earl Rudolph, the lord of the district, having strayed into the forest, entered his life.

Alys was not in the least afraid of any person, or of the real or imaginary monsters of the wood.

"Who are you, dirty boy?" she asked. Luke was so enchanted with her young beauty, and the royal manner in which her minute ladyship addressed him, that for a time he could only stare and wonder; then he laughed.

CHAPTER II

ALYS

LUKE was one of Nature's children; afraid of nothing, save meanness and wanton cruelty. Without hesitancy he accepted the new-comer into the democracy of his playmates which included no other earthly child, none but dream-children. She was to him just one more of the infinite wonders of the forest; another occupant of fancy's brilliant realm, sharing existence with flowers, fairies, and the other happinesses met by him in vision-wanderings through the mystic wonderlands of religion and sleep.

Alys was not one of Nature's children. She was as artificial a maid as it was possible to find in the simple land of Argovie.

At first she received Luke's confidence and laughter with young haughtiness and the semblance of offence; but soon the original, natural talk of the brown-skinned boy, and the brightness of intelligence in his deep-grey eyes—the redemption of an ugly face—wore away prejudices, and caused her to forget his rags and his unaffected air of equality.

Alys

She condescended to listen to his gossip about the pigs, his comrades; and then told him something of herself—how she was the daughter of a strong man who hunted and slew all manner of fierce four-footed creatures; how magnificent her father was in his forest-livery of brown and green; how proud, rich, and powerful was Godfrey's master, the great, glad, long-bearded lord, who owned—oh, to her little mind how very much he owned!—all the world so far as she had known it.

Luke listened with happy eagerness. Here was more food for his hungry imagination. This little maid had brought new folk to people the countries of his dreams. She sat in prim stateliness beside him on a felled tree-trunk, and told all she knew of her life and the important, unimportant people she dwelt among.

As she sat there talking, heedless of all but her tale, Luke gazed and wondered. Now he knew how Titania looked; but Titania, in her most royal and fairy moments, could not have excelled in beauty this huntsman's daughter. So he told himself.

It was the hour of evening, when even the uglinesses of the earth, through the mellow luminance of the setting sun, take on temporary beauty. As the sun-rays, lighting the maid, illumined the little face and form, Alys looked lovely indeed.

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The prim linen cap, the golden hair which hung about her brow and ears and touched her neck, the blue eyes, the red lips, soft skin, and small white teeth; the simple green frock, the brown hands clasped on her knee, the small shoes of untanned leather, combined to make for Luke a memorable picture.

“Do you know any angels?” he asked, quite honestly.

“No,” she answered with simplicity similar to his. “Old Uncle Noel, our priest, keeps them locked in the chapel. Do you?”

“I? No. I’m too wicked.”

“Are you?” she asked, and edged slightly away from him.

Luke prodded the soft mould with his brown toes as he talked, and she, in her turn peeping at him, thought “What a dirty boy!”

He was lost in humble contemplation for some long minutes. “Yes, I am a sinner! Brother Hilary says so often, and my mother Mause says so sometimes; but Kelp, my father, thinks better of me—he says I have the innocent soul of a pig. Father keeps the pigs of the monastery, and knows them all so well—from Jezebel, the big sow, to Blossom, the squeaker—that few men and very few women, he says, are better than pigs. They are more kind-hearted than people think. I never

Alys

see the angels; but I listen for them often, and sometimes hear them singing by the brook when the monks are chanting vespers; and often when I sit in the tree watching the sun hide behind the hill I hear the noise of their wings. That is only in the evening. They generally sleep in the daytime so as not to see men being wicked if they can help it; and fly all over the world in the night when bad people are asleep and stars are shining. That is when they kiss the children."

"Do they kiss the children?"

"Yes."

"Who told you?"

"Whispers."

"Do they kiss—me?" she asked, looking with large dilating eyes at the boy.

Throughout his life he remembered those eyes and that moment.

"You know they do!"

"Oh!" said she, and blushed.

"Oh!" said he, and blushed too. The conversation was getting beyond their years.

To banish the mutual embarrassment he passed for a time from conversation to activity. He showed her how cleverly he could climb a tree, and swung from the branches with an indifference to danger which made her quake.

Then, having played sufficiently on her anxiety,

Pilgrimage

he came down, bringing with him as peace-offering, a squirrel. The small prisoner peered with keen, beady eyes at the temporary master and mistress of its fate; and when it was given liberty went without eagerness, for the grasp of the boy had been very gentle, and the creature was too ignorant of men to be frightened.

The instinct of hospitality came suddenly to Luke. He thrust his hand into the rough satchel which was slung across his shoulder and offered her bread, nuts, and acorns. She was suspicious of the acorns, not having tasted that kind of fruit before; but soon was munching the better kinds of food cautiously. For a little while appetite displaced speech.

Presently they talked again of all-important trivialities, till after a while Alys said, "Have you any legends? Boy, tell me a story."

He told her one or two of the tales of saints—folk-lore swathed in a halo of mediæval sanctity—which he had heard Mause and her gossips telling on winter nights, while they crouched round the crackling fire in the darkened room. But Alys did not care for saints, she wanted to hear of knights and dragons. She cared not for ascetic heroes or prayerful heroism; but liked much love and a little fighting.

Luke had no knight-and-dragon stories; but

Alys

he had wits, and for a small silent while cudgelled them for a theme. So long was the period of silent meditation that Alys grew impatient.

Luke had only the faintest knowledge of the wonderful world of which Alys wanted to hear; but, spurred by her too evident impatience, he tumbled into the task of tale-telling on his own account. The tale told him, rather than he the tale.

“There was a wonderful great lord,” he said, “who lived in a great house—a palace of gold, and flowers, and shining whiteness.”

“I should like to see that house!”

“And the knights and huntsmen of this great lord, and their ladies, they never did anything evil, but killed bad men, and hunted cruel animals, and loved the flowers, and made the palace happy. They were all so good that evil men were frightened of them, and did not dare go near the palace. If they met the great lord or any of his knights in the wood, they fled and hid behind the bushes, hoping to escape from him. But always they hated themselves because they were such cowards, and always they wanted to enter the palace to see the pictures which were there. But they dared not go to the gate, and whenever they saw it—the gate was all silver, flashing like sunshine—they ran away.”

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“ Why didn't they creep in at night-time? ”

“ Because—because the great lord kept lamps burning round the palace, and the gate and windows were all guarded by knights. But early one day a bad man, who was tired of being wicked, was bold enough to run to the gate and put his hand on the silver bugle that hung before it. He put the bugle to his lips and blew, but no sound came. He blew, and blew, and blew; but no sound ever came; and yet it was just like his own black bugle and he could always sound that. Then he tried to force himself between the silver bars, to get into the palace that way; but he could not do so. It was as if hands which he could not see were always pushing him back. At last, he sorrowed with despair, and sat on the white steps and wept. The moment he wept, a knight, very stern, appeared on the wall above.

“ ‘ Why are you here? ’ he asked.

“ The enemy who wanted to be a friend answered, ‘ I must come in and live in your palace. It is like being dead to live outside.’

“ ‘ You willed it,’ said the knight very sternly.”

“ What did the cruel, good knight mean by saying, ‘ You willed it ’? ” asked Alys.

“ He meant, I suppose, that the bad man had done wrong against the great lord, and so, of course,

Alys

could not live in the palace, where there were only his friends.

“ ‘ I am very, very sorry,’ said the bad man.

“ ‘ Go away and show that you are,’ answered the stern knight. So the bad man went to the wild wilderness; but before he said good-bye to the silver gate he put his hand inside the bars and plucked some flowers to keep for good remembrance.”

“ Yes, and then? ”

“ He went into the wilderness.”

“ Yes, and then? ”

“ That is all,” answered Luke, puzzled.

“ No, no, tell me more. He went into the wilderness and killed lions and dragons, and rescued a lovely princess who looked like me; and then went back, and the great lord opened the gate himself, gave him a lovely robe, and made him a knight. He married the princess, who turned out to be the great lord’s daughter, and lived to kill many bad men. Is that not so? ”

“ I really do not know.”

“ Oh, you are a silly boy! All stories must end in some way.”

“ Yes, but I don’t know the ending of that one.”

“ But you—were making it up? ”

“ Yes—I was making it up; but I couldn’t make up any more.”

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" Well, tell me another."

" No, let us listen for angels' wings." So they set themselves deliberately to their exalted purpose, and were very, very still.

Slowly the sun went down. Slowly his legacy of small pink clouds passed, leaving only the greyness of twilight behind. The children, forgetful of the flight of day, still sat side by side, eagerly listening for the sough of passing angels' wings.

Luke was roused from his reverie, and Alys frightened by the sound of Kelp's rough voice.

" Naughty brat!" he said, as he saw the boy sitting on the tree-trunk. " Your mother is anxious about you. Why are you still squatting there?" Then, catching sight of Alys, he cried, " Ah, small maid, who are you?"

Alys suddenly felt lonely and frightened at sight of the swineherd, who certainly—with his tanned skin, naked arms and legs, feet in buskins, and matted hair and beard—was no god of beauty.

But the gaunt man knew how to be gentle.

" Do not be afraid," he said softly, as he raised her and seated the little girl on his shoulder. " Are you lost? Where do you live?"

As she did not answer, Luke said, " Her father is huntsman to Lord Rudolph."

" Oh, your father is big Godfrey, eh?"

Alys

"Yes, man," answered Alys.

"Then we shall soon find him. Take hold of my hair!" he said.

Alys clutched the tangled locks to steady herself, and Kelp began his two-mile journey through the forest towards Godfrey's home.

"Good-bye!" Luke called out to her.

"Go home!" was all the answer he received from Kelp.

That was Luke's farewell for many a day to Alys the daughter of Godfrey. He did not stir while there was the possibility of seeing the strayed fairy, his foster-father's burden. At last the two passed into the darkness, and the boy went slowly home.

CHAPTER III

COWL AND MOTLEY

DURING the following year Kelp died, and was laid to rest in a corner of the graveyard where, in humble equality, the monks and lay-servants of the great house were buried. Luke, child though he was, became swineherd in place of his foster-father, and daily drove the pigs to and from their pastures in the adjacent forests.

He had in full measure shared the love of Kelp for his charges. He knew the creatures all, from the herd's patriarch to the smallest member, and appreciated and sympathised with each one's individuality; for pigs, as men, have their frets and fancies, and the test of the true swineherd is to know the particular idiosyncrasies of their charges.

The boy was perfectly proud of his occupation, and rejoiced in its responsibility. Although the other herdsmen and servants of the monastery looked with various degrees of contempt on the keeper of pigs, Luke was—as Kelp had been—in his unaffected simplicity, happily superior

Cowl and Motley

to their superiority. So Mause and he remained the monks' tenants, and the days sped fleetly. The seasons came and went, the unregarded years crept by.

Although the years went by unregarded, with no eventful history, they were a period of probation and continuous development to Luke. He had no book-learning to speak of, nor any eagerness even to set eyes on the treasures in the scriptorium, of which, indeed, he had only vaguely heard; but his mind was keen, his eyes alert; there was little of natural life he was not well-acquainted with. And always he was dreaming of the world invisible—elves and angels were his day-long companions.

To him in those free days this world of reality was in truth the unreal world—this earthly existence was far more a fancy and a vision than the weird country of his day-dreams. Imagination lent enchantment to every object in life: all the individuals of Argovie whom Luke knew, he idealised—and how little they deserved it! But the boy was the happier for being an idealist during those young, untroubled years.

Luke's best-known acquaintances—after Mause, who sacrificed herself to the dull god household-work—were, to outward seeming, a strangely-contrasted pair. How far they differed within is

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known only to the Giver of souls. Probably the difference was not so great.

A big-browed, thin-faced monk walked slowly through the wood which skirted the southern boundary of the monastery lands. He was no shaveling, for his head needed no razor. Baldness supplied him with a more than adequate tonsure. He strode along; hands clasped behind him. His eyes were small and narrow, through them no glimpse of the soul could be gained; they hid and not displayed the light within. The thin lips drooped at the corners, for Brother Hilary was a disappointed man, and had the reputation, among the monks at least, of being morose and sour. He was the loneliest brother in the monastery, and the least loved. Yet Luke had for him an affection felt for none of the others; the boy knew that his sourness was only the mask of sweetness of heart; that the rasping tongue, when there was necessity, could utter words of healing and comforting.

Brother Hilary had been Luke's instructor, and though able to teach him little more than the ordinary store of mediæval ignorance, had through his companionship raised and stimulated him. The dreams of the swineherd were nobler and more exalted because of the trend of Hilary's teaching and the influence of his personality.

When the monk, a brown figure, wandering in

Cowl and Motley

meditation through the wood, came upon Luke, the boy was sitting on the low bough of a tree, switching with leafy branch the bristly back of a hog which nosed laboriously about the decayed vegetation.

"Lazy lad!" said the monk.

"The wasps have been teasing Hilary! I am giving him comfort."

"Wasps? Hilary?—Who?"

"That's his name."

"The hog's?"

"Yes, Father. He—he's the best of the herd!"

"Oh," mumbled the monk gazing curiously at the boy. "Who gave the beast that name?"

"I did, Father. I like him."

"Oh!" growled the other once again. "Are you the name-giver?"

"I name them all."

"After the reverend brethren?"

"No, Father. I only call the most respectable swine by the reverend names. Hilary is the best of the company."

"Oh!" The pig's reverend namesake continued his way musing; there was the suggestion of a smile about the lips, leaving Luke once more to his humble employment and the luminous

Pilgrimage

thoughts which flashed in endless procession through his brain.

The boy, although neither he nor any one else was aware of it, had built for himself, out of the material of earth-things, a cathedral of glowing idylls. Its ceiling, the crystal blue of the sky; its walls, the hills and trees; its floor, the grass and rivers; it was a building, mind-made, infinite in expanse; and Luke—in his simple splendid isolation—alone lived within it. His utter unworldliness, and pure exaltation, kept him solitary. There was no other—man, woman, or child—like him in that earlier chapter of the Argovian world. Yet was he, with all his humility and exaltedness, a natural boy, with the simple hopes and ambitions of natural boyhood.

Luke proved his naturalness and humanity; for his best hopes and thoughts came to be clustered mainly about a girl, a girl idealised. The bright picture of little Alys, which had gladdened and glorified a bygone autumn afternoon, remained with him—an unfading picture painted with living colours on the tablets of his mind. Wherever he went that bright young creature also wandered, and grew with him. In his most royal dreams—dazzling were those dreams sometimes—she shared his throne, or, more frequently, knew him as her

Cowl and Motley

loyal subject, and accepted his reverences with appropriate majesty.

Since the vision of Her had first come, he had gone through the natural stages of childhood and hobbledehoyhood. His mind alone had never been hobbledehoy. As his faculty for idealising had grown, so the picture of the Perfect She grew in glory, increased with every perfection; until it was as far beyond Alys as the heroes of the golden age were, in their attributes, superior to ordinary men.

Luke's second friend, Ulf, was that kind of sage whom fools call a fool. He was jester to Earl Rudolph, and a true, good fellow. Luke loved him, and Ulf reciprocated the affection. Each trusted the other completely; both swineherd and jester were gentlemen.

Their acquaintance had come about casually. Ulf, like Touchstone, loved meditation in a forest. He rejoiced in the world's relief from the world's fopperies and unrealities; and knew that in the leafy loneliness he could be himself, and not the ape of himself as men and his master insisted he should be.

One day in his wanderings he had come upon Luke, and the pair drifted from casual converse into good acquaintance, from good acquaintance into comradeship. When Ulf was alone with

Pilgrimage

Luke he forgot to be a thing of quip, pun, or merry in consequence, and returned to his true self—a mordantly sensible man; but let Hilary or some other—any other—human being join them, and Ulf was in motley again, a bubbling fount of fool-wisdom and artificial wit.

It was unfortunate for Ulf that Earl Rudolph's father had one morning, long before, heard him make a good joke out of season. From that moment the boy was marked for the motley. His natural wit had, through habit and the demands of the market, been debased into a mechanical kind of humour; he had become a popular jester with a reputation which tended to tyrannise. Like many another good clown he often hid a tired heart with a glad face, and eclipsed a sigh with some smiling impertinence.

His face was grey, his hair flecked with silver. In his eyes was a slumbering weariness, the ghosts of slain energies; always a shadow lurked behind his laughter.

Less than ten minutes after the monk had passed, Luke heard the tinkling of little bells which announced the approach of Ulf. At the same moment there seemed to be an added twittering among the birds, as though they welcomed a friend.

“Good-morrow, Lucas, enemy of Israel,” rang

Cowl and Motley

out Ulf's greeting. "And how are the children of Ham?"

The jester ran along the avenue, leapt lightly over a felled tree trunk, and, after he had prodded a self-indulgent pig with his bauble, threw himself on a soft bed of springy grass at the foot of an oak. He lay there for a small while, breathing hard and smiling.

Presently a robin which had been whistling in the branches flew down and perched on his foot. Ulf stuck the base of his bauble, its top ornamented with a debased version of his own head, into the earth, and very cautiously—so as not to displace red-breast—raised himself to a seated position. Other birds—finches, tits, linnets, sparrows, thrushes, starlings, blackbirds—were constantly arriving, until Ulf had thirty to forty around him. Then from his pouch he took handfuls of corn and broken bread and tossed them to the birds. At once there were excited squabblings and scramblings. Ulf watched the business with a cynical smile. "The world of men in little!" was his comment.

One by one the birds flew away; but while the jester was there, the robin remained moving or perching near him.

"Lucas, son of Kelp, you live a happy life,"

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Ulf said. Luke was still wielding the leafy branch to comfort the pig.

"There are worse things than being born a swineherd if you have no itch for cheers," Ulf continued, contemplatively. "You can be as miserable as you like, and the world will not pester you to make it laugh. The man who is born with weakness for roaring should be his own wit-maker. But here I am grumbling again. Heaven chide me! I am always grumbling; I pray your pardon!"

"Talk till you find peace in yourself, Ulf," Luke answered.

"To think that out of prose-making comfort may come. You are the only one who allows this jaded dog to growl, without minding his growling. If you had been born a monk or nun, Luke, you would ere this have had sickly visions and been on the straight road to canonisation. Happy swineherd! Blessed protector of pig! The hogs, your followers, really ought to be gentlemen. But I will cease this plaint and complaint. What have been your dreams to-day?"

"Oh, tell me of yourself, Ulf."

"No. Ulf the fool is tired of Ulf the fool."

"Tell me of yourself, Ulf, until you have growled away your melancholy. The Earl has not smiled at your witticisms?"

Cowl and Motley

“Has he not! I wish he would realise their seriousness now and again. It is heart-breaking! If I read the Commandments to him he would bellow because of their humour. He laughs at everything I say; the worse my jokes are, the more he roars. To-day I served up seven oddities that are falling to pieces with age. His laughter came like a burden of thunder after every one of them. If he has not heard them fifty times during the last five years I am a musty mummy. And not only he, but the entire company of rascals who eat his food and bear swords for him grinned in chorus.”

“Poor Ulf! Why do you serve up jokes? Why not be quite serious and only utter wise sayings, always. Then they would see you were sage, and find a true fool to take your place.”

“Happy innocence! I wish the angels had laid me in Mause’s cradle. A hundred times have I uttered words of wisdom with all the gravity of a fledged priest, and never have they laughed more heartily than then. So strongly have they the ha-ha disease, that they grin at everything I utter, be the words foolish or true. And now my growl has ended; the dog lies him down to hear of the swineherd’s visions.”

“I have no visions; but, of course, in the solitudes I needs must think.”

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“ Did the lady of the dreams come again? ”

“ She did. The day which passes without one visit from her is a day of clouds and dreariness. She sat on that throne ”—Luke pointed to a wild-rose bush—“ and wore a crown of gold, less golden than the hair which shone beneath it; and as I knelt before her, she touched my shoulder with the point of her sceptre and said, ‘ Luke, my one subject. Be brave man and true; and, ere you die, you shall be noble knight, and perhaps wear a coronet on your brow. ’ ”

Already the swineherd felt the pressure of the golden rim. The light of exaltation shone in Luke’s eyes. He stared with rapture at a patch of blue sky which gleamed between the dark-green foliage before him. He was verily in a palace of dreams—in his own cathedral, wherein was no other man; though Ulf’s feet were not so far from the threshold.

The jester had no spirit of mockery within him then. He entered with full sympathy into the imaginings of his companion. He gazed with real reverence and something of adoration at the youth’s sunburnt face, and honestly wished that within his own soul a flame of similar inspiration might be kindled.

“ You have never told me her name,” he said

Cowl and Motley

quietly. "What name have you given the dream-lady?"

Luke's rapture passed from him. He looked gently down into the face of his friend, and answered with the solemnity of the splendidly simple. "I must not tell you her name. It is enshrined here." With simple gesture he touched his breast.

"Ugh! I'm tired of love's sickness, selfishness and caterwauling sentiment. For ten minutes yesterday there were lovers meawing under my very ears. I had tried to avoid talking to any one by pretending to be asleep. I snored like an ambitious trumpeter; and that was my reward. Her eyes are blue, I know."

"You don't; but they are blue—the colour of cornflowers."

"I knew it. Girl's eyes are always blue or brown to lover's sight—often black to husband's. 'Tis a sadly deceitful world. I knew a damsel once. Her eyes were green as grass—dirty grass, and I told her so. She swore at me, spat at me, hissed at me, like a cat-goose. I had uttered the truth which is beyond forgiveness. Ever afterwards I declared they were blue; and she nearly married me!"

Luke laughed; the small spell of gloom that hung over the jester was dispelled. It was a

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time of happiness to both of them. The sombreness of Ulf's spirits was never too heavy for sympathy to fail to break it; light-hearted converse with his unspoilt friend soon restored him to normal genial content. It was the artificial life in the castle of the Earl and the knowledge of the waste of his own individuality which depressed him. Out of doors, in Luke's society, he was a renewed man.

CHAPTER IV

PILATE'S QUESTION

THEY were aware of footsteps approaching—the tread of sandals among crackling twigs and brittle last-year leaves. Ulf seized his bauble. The jester re-entered his skin. He looked round archly, with pursed lips and quizzical eyes to see who was coming. At the same time, the friendly robin flew to a branch overhead whence he watched his fellow-mortals, and now and then piped his confident note.

Re-enter Brother Hilary. At sight of Ulf his lips compressed more severely. The monk had no love for the motley. It was, he thought, the worst livery for laymen, and Ulf knew he thought so. As also did Luke, but he was fully loyal to his friend, and not in complete sympathy with his mentor from the monastery in that respect.

Ulf rose to his feet, being nothing if not courtly in the presence of a representative of Mother Church; but he compromised with his inherent passion for independence by leaning against a

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tree, prepared for the inevitable verbal assault, which was not long in coming.

“ Your master hunts? ” Hilary asked.

“ No, truly,” answered Ulf, “ he is visiting the Abbot of St. Anthony’s.”

“ St. Anthony’s! Then you were well-advised not to go with him. The Abbot has poor humour and heavy hands for merrymen.”

“ Truly I was well-advised—I have company better suited to me here. What more could fool desire? ”

A sparkle awoke in Hilary’s eyes. In his heart there was laughter, but from Luke and Ulf the hilarity was hidden.

“ And what does the Earl at St. Anthony’s? ”

“ Truly I know not, unless it be to put more gold into the Abbot’s coffers.”

“ Gold, rascal? ”

“ Silver, also. The Church does not despise the little fishes.”

“ You speak with a flippant tongue, fool.”

“ That is the fool’s mark. Am I to be blamed? It is only men of learning and reverence who speak with hesitation. Where else than in the pulpit do we hear stuttering, and stammering, and the singsong business. Truly the message which they must give is too heavy for the weak mouths of men? ”

Pilate's Question

"You are a shrewd fellow, Ulf."

"Ay, Father, shrewd and good," exclaimed Luke enthusiastically.

"Good? That is another sort of pigeon."

"Ulf is a good man, Father. I know him best of all. He should have been a priest and worn the Church's livery instead of this red and yellow. There is a deal of kindness and truth hidden under his quaintness of speech. His thoughts are as wise as—yours."

"As mine? "

"As wise as any man's."

"What, Ulf the jester? "

"Yes, Father, he."

"Luke, what does this mean? What sprite has entered your wits? "

Then Ulf arising from his real self, spoke.

"Reverend Father," said he, "Luke is wrong. I am neither good nor shrewd." The ring of honesty in his voice grew deeper as he continued. "Had I been either, I could not, should not, be wielding this." He swung the bauble, while the bells on his arm jingled. "It is a mad world. Life itself is the chief insanity. And nothing is so mad as the brainpan of the philosopher. Your crack-brained jester is the only sane man; he shows his sanity by not endeavouring to hide his madness. Do you follow my illogic? "

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"I do not," said Hilary, decisively.

"I think I do—a little!" Luke exclaimed.

"Oh, then you also will be wearing cap and bells before the big sow has her fifth farrow. Good day! God bless you, Ulf the fool."

"Will not the Reverend Father stay with two of the world's sheep a little longer; or does this old ram's pessimistical bleating jar his ears?" Ulf asked, a new tone of entreaty in his voice.

Hilary stopped suddenly and pondered. He turned, and sat by Luke on the fallen trunk; a smile shone more conspicuously in his eyes, though his straight lips were still set sternly.

"What then is your new humour, merryman?" he asked.

"Tell me this, Father. I can ask it of you. It is a question I have long bothered my brains with. Pontius Pilate asked it long ago. What is truth?"

Hilary looked reflectively at the enquirer. Then he said:

"Truth is what the Church teaches, my son."

"And the truths which the Church does not teach, Father?"

"There are none, my son."

"Oh, that is soon settled."

"The Church has no uncertainties."

"Its preachers often have."

Pilate's Question

“ In their preaching, perhaps; not in their faith. That is a stronghold built upon a rock.”

Luke had listened to the brief abrupt colloquy with curious interest. Neither of the speakers was like his ordinary self. Ulf was more direct than ever he had known him; his speech had become quite without crotchet and conceit; while the monk, although he had spoken with confidence, was more genial than was his wont. Perhaps he recognized now, for the first time, the true metal of Earl Rudolph's jester, and was glad to talk with a man.

“ Faith is a fine lady,” Ulf said, “ but what if she ride a wrong horse? ”

“ Meaning, that the faith may be in what is wrong? ”

“ Even so, Father.”

“ Then we return to my first answer. What the Church teaches is the truth. The truth cannot be wrong.”

“ But the Church may be wrong.”

“ Hush! ” Brother Hilary said, as he looked swiftly around. “ If you were not a privileged fool ”—his mind recognised quite well that Ulf was not a fool—“ I should be severe on you for those silly words. Do not even think the thought, nor you, Luke. It is itself a sin. The Church cannot be wrong, do wrong, or teach wrong. The

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saints and angels are our guardians. Faith may be, as you say, a fine lady; but she cannot ride on any horse but the right one, if the steed comes out of the Church's stable."

In his eagerness, Ulf had approached the monk and was standing looking down on him. He had been punctuating his words with the foolish bauble, which, indeed, mocked his earnestness. The robin flew from the tree and perched upon his shoulder, but Ulf's restlessness sent it back to the bough. Hilary's eyes shone with keen intellectual brightness. Luke forgot everything—pigs and dreams—in the interest of this quickening encounter.

"Why has the jester suddenly turned theologian?" the monk asked.

"Because the fool has loneliness; and he who is lonely, watching men and animals, trees and flowers, flourish and fade and die, thinks and thinks."

"The curse of loneliness!" exclaimed the monk, almost with emotional earnestness.

Perhaps the man imprisoned in the cowl, with the fetters of the thrice-knotted girdle about his waist, told something of a secret in those four words.

"But thought is a compensatory blessing!" cried Ulf.

Pilate's Question

"Is it?" said the monk. "I am not so sure of that. Thought is sometimes an enemy, too often the beginning of sin——"

"And a friend, and at least the beginning of wisdom. Dame Wisdom is an old woman no man can rail against."

"I believe, with Luke, that you ought not to be wearing motley," cried Hilary, suddenly looking up.

"Are my jokes so bad?"

"It is the man, not the merryman, I am thinking of."

"Well, I'll be frank too. You are the first monk for whom I have felt the beginning of respect—yes, that's a true confession; though I have made many a shaveling—vanity thy pets are clerical!—purple by flattery. The man of God of these days—sad the days!—is a kind of lady. The minds of both are twin-sisters. But you, Father, are no such monk. You, Father, are a man; and if I should not be wearing motley, you would have been better out of a cassock."

"Ha! you say things freely," said Hilary; "but you have the liberty to do so. A fool has many privileges."

"You don't mean to say you envy me!" returned the other, venturing to give words to the tone in the monk's voice.

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Hilary did not at once answer these words but gazed before him, a far-away look in his eyes. Perhaps, in mind-mockery, he saw himself and Ulf in changed clothes, each playing and living the other's part. If only it might have been—even for a little while! his hidden heart would insist on saying. If only it might have been! He imagined himself in motley, living the life irresponsible, living the life he despised, playing with people; quips and fancies, fair examples of fool's wit, flashed through his brain. The impossible fancy pleased him strangely. He gave rein to it. In his soul's secrecy he knew he revolted often against the restraint of the cloisters, and was wearied with their confinement. He wished to go beyond Argovie, to lands over the sea, to discover those mysterious places where dwelled

“ The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads
Do grow beneath their shoulders.”

But no more of this folly! Vows had been sworn, and—there was an end of the dreaming! Hilary, brushing aside his momentary discontent, was faithful monk once more.

“ No, I do not envy you! ” came his answer abruptly. “ From my soul I have pity for you! ”

Luke was greatly impressed by their converse. All his infancy, his boyhood, and during the early

Pilate's Question

days of youth, he had lived with happy wanderings in a world of fancy. His mind had drifted through regions of glorious vision, of glittering insubstantialities; but the recent colloquy between jester and monk had roused his reasoning faculty and quickened his sense of enquiry. He wanted to hear more of men's thoughts, to probe deeper into the depths.

The monk was, however, too wary to resume a dangerous topic in his presence. Ulf, perhaps for the same reason, was content not to continue the word-wrestle then. With hasty farewell, he went.

The robin followed him a little way, and then returned. Ulf twice whistled its call; the bird piped instant answer.

The jester strode through the forest until he came to a river. He kept to its left bank until it broadened into a lake, fringed with rushes and troubled with wild growth. Then, turning to the left, he ascended a smooth and grassy hill till he came to a cottage, nested among fir-trees.

He tapped at the door, which was opened at once by an old woman, who greeted him gladly. There was welcome written largely in her smile.

"Good morrow, good mother," he greeted her heartily.

"Good morrow, good friend," said she. "The maid has been looking for you this two hours."

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" Foolish maid ! " said he teasingly, loud enough to be heard in the room beyond. " Does she not know that my lord the jester has the business of a kingdom to transact ; and cannot waste time with infants until the affairs of the wide world have been adjusted ? "

His words were answered by a girl's soft voice with a plaintive ring in it.

" You are so late, you had forgotten me ! "

He passed through the front room, into the chamber beyond. On the floor was a litter of straw, and there a young girl was lying. Her face was pale, the eyes heavy and dark with illness. She was restless. Fever had grip of her.

" Nay, child," Ulf assured her in kind, low tones, for he loved her. " I will never forget you."

At the words her dull eyes flashed, for the moment lost their heaviness. She sat up suddenly, seized his hands.

" And never will forget me ? " she asked passionately.

" Hush ! " said he ; with cool fingers he touched her hot wrist. " I will never forget you."

" Never ? "

" Never ! Never ! " His deliberate asseverations comforted her. He softly kissed her hand.

" I am better now," she murmured, and sank back, closing her eyes.

Pilate's Question

He sat on the floor by her side, and, crooning, sang her a little song. She listened intently till the ditty was ended. Then her lips uttered a sigh; and for a while there was silence. Afterwards she spoke again. Her voice was firmer now, less querulous.

"There are many fine ladies in Earl Rudolph's hall," she said

"Are there?" asked he, and made a wry face at her mother, who happened then to be entering. The grimace made the old woman laugh. She was one of Ulf's appreciative audience.

The sick girl heard the laughter, and, her jealousy ablaze, looked up. "What are they like?"

"The fine ladies? Oh, massive, magnificent, monumental, big, short, fat, thin; aged twenty, thirty, forty, but after all—just women."

"Some of them must be very beautiful."

"Beautiful? The Earl's mother was very beautiful, before she died—thirty-seven years ago this very morrow. She was my first love," he murmured with mock pathos, "although when I told her she had a mouth for mushrooms and ought to say baa when she hungered, she thanked me, in effective fashion, with her own fair hands."

The mother giggled anew, and went from the room. The ghost of a smile, moved by her

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mother's mirth, crossed the ill maiden's face. Ulf in his heart rejoiced at the sight.

"Is there not one very lovely lady there now?" she persisted.

"There is, as lovely as Mayday moonlight, as frosted apple-blossom."

"And who is she?"

"She? The deaf one!"

"The deaf one!—Why?"

"Because she can't hear what I say, so I need not say anything. I love Mistress Few-words, and dote on my Lady Silence."

"You will never forget me?" again she whispered with the inconsequence of jealous love.

"Never! Never!" once more he assured her. Once she took his hands and clung to them.

The old woman returned, bringing wheaten cakes on a platter, and cider in a wooden mug. Yorg, the husband of the house, followed.

"Heh, Ulf!" said he. That was his greeting. He also saluted his daughter. "Heh, wench!" and without waiting for reply, clattered out of the room and cottage, back to his boat and nets, for he was of the trade of Simon Peter.

"The goodman is talkative," was Ulf's comment, as he put down the emptied mug.

"He means much," said the wife, refilling it.

"You talk instead," murmured the girl to Ulf.

Pilate's Question

He looked at her with lips pursed. "My tongue is so weary of wagging," said he. "But you shall have a story to think about after I am gone. You know the magic pool."

"I know no pools now!" complained the poor maid.

"You mean the one surrounded by osiers, where Long Wat killed the river snake!" cried the mother eagerly.

"No, not that one! And you did not know the old woman who lived by it either. I will tell you about her. Dame—what was her name? I forget—never mind! Many hundreds of years ago, before even I was born, an old, old woman lived in this wood; and not far from her cottage was a pool of water, with a belt of osiers nearly round it."

"I knew it!" said the maid's mother exultantly.

"It dried up seventy-two years before the oldest person now living was born, and of course the osiers died soon after."

"Let him talk, mother!" said the maid severely.

"Well, the old woman got her livelihood by making and selling simples compounded from herbs she found in the wood; and by scraping together what small monies she could, and starving when there was nothing else to be done, she

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managed to exist. She was very old, very lonely, and very poor, having not even a cat's friendship. As for humankind, they mocked and derided her, the saints! One day the woman, in her search for a choice herb which was necessary for a medicine she was compounding, wandered to the pool, and there by the side of it rested, stared at the green water, and thought of her weariness and sorrows. She saw her own face mirrored there: what a scarred, seamed, grief-worn face it was! Every one of its wrinkles told of disappointments.

“But a better time was at hand. A fairy—or was it an angel? I don't remember—came down, and with wand of silver touched the pool. The old woman stared. Were her purblind eyes deceiving her? No, that was her countenance, but many of the wrinkles were gone, the hair was now not completely white. There was still a suggestion of hope in the brave face. It was she as she was ten years before! Ah, happy days done! And ten years, twenty years earlier still. How different she had been then; and how much more hopeful, before Time, the ancient tyrant, the thieving rascal, had taken the years and nearly all the hope away. Her mind, in imagination, saw herself again in middle years. The bloom was still on her face, the light of hope in her eyes was—*there* it was! The water gave back the image.

Pilate's Question

The face in the pool was thirty years younger than the face looking into it.

“ An exultation—the exultation of strong life—ran again through the heart of the dame, her veins throbbed with renewed warmth and healthful certitude. The joy of younger days was wildly alive within her. How brave was she—how proud of her hopes and intentions, in early womanhood! As a changing picture the face and form in the reflection went youthwards. From the depth of green waters a young face smiled. There was brightness in the eyes, brown hair hung in clusters about an unwrinkled brow, white teeth gleamed between lips which now . . .

“ Once again the old woman lived her dead life. The lover for whom she had waited nearly three-score years seemed once more possible. Would he never be back from that marauding expedition whence every one of his companions had returned, though with wounds and shame? He alone had remained away, leaving her to long for him, and to wait until hope had to be buried. But now with renewed youth impossible hopes revived. An excess of the happiness of budding womanhood caused her eyes to become tear-dimmed. That small sacrifice to emotion took pain from the old dame's heart.

“ When she looked again, it was not a woman

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who gazed at her from the pool, but a girl—a child—a babe. Then it seemed to the over-eager dame that the mortal image faded, departed, changed. Out of the pool smiled an angel-face. Changed though it was, she knew it. It was her own face re-perfected. How beautiful is mortal immortalised! From that spiritualised state she had come to this earthly existence. To that she was going!

“The grey face was alive with yearning and exultation. The bent form leaned over the pool. Aged lips went to touch angel lips. A flood of joy suffused her. As the lips—mortal and immortal—met at the surface of the pool, darkness—a darkness thronged with light—closed about her. The old dame’s life was ended; now—she lived!”

Ulf stopped to look at the girl who was weeping. The mother, who stood there listening, had been all the while waiting to laugh, and had not laughed at all.

“That is the worst story you ever told,” said she.

“No, mother, it was beautiful. It was said to comfort me. Dear Ulf! You are much more heavenly than the priest. He frightens me with flames; but you make death to mean love and happiness. I—I shall be glad to be dead.”

“Hush, Lilith!” said Ulf kindly. “You are to

Pilate's Question

be well again; to be strong again; to go with me one day to look for the place where the magic pool was. Mother!" he continued, "that was a poor sort of story for a fool to tell. Come, answer me this: why is a choked chimney like a rotten fish? You can't guess? Because neither of them can be smoked. I hope that's good enough for you."

It was. The mother laughed and repeated to herself question and answer, while the jester, ashamed of himself for making the sacrifice of folly, took tender leave of Lilith and returned to his mirthful, miserable duties.

CHAPTER V

COMMENCEMENT OF THE QUEST

SHORTLY after Ulf had gone, Hilary said to Luke, "That is a good man, though he speaks queerly, and asks strange questions. There is some sorrow at the back of his heart which makes him doubtful of the truth; but you and I—we are not doubtful."

Luke answered "No"; and when the word was spoken, for the first time knew he did not possess all the confidence he had done.

Ulf's enquiry had made him not exactly doubtful, but eager to question himself. He wanted again to be alone, so that unhindered he might struggle with newborn whys and wherefores. Now there was to be a query behind every fact in life. He was already asking himself Ulf's question, "What is truth?"—adding to it, "What is true?"

He glanced towards Hilary. Should he tell the monk that the word "No" did not convey all his answer. Hilary was his friend, and could be depended upon to treat his difficulties sympathetically. But the stage for such confidence had not

Commencement of the Quest

yet come. He must strive first to help himself before going to others.

The monk had shrewdly divined something of Luke's quandary. "Keep to your dreams," he counselled, "leave doubts and questionings to Ulf and me. Holy Church has a bridge over every difficulty; so—the peace which dwells in faith be with you, Luke!"

He raised his hand in hurried benediction and walked away. Luke watched the monk's head bend in thought, one hand, in the wonted manner, clasp the other behind his back, outward evidence of deep meditation within. Hilary was praying in thought, praying with passion that the soul of the swineherd should be saved from afflictions of doubt.

As soon as he was alone, Luke began, in helter-skelter fashion, to self-question.

"Why was I born to tend swine; while Ulf must make mirth for Earl Rudolph? Why should Rudolph be lord, the owner of lands and servants; while Hilary is destined to spend his days cowed and cloistered? Were the circumstances of earth-being an accident—a lottery; or was God by these seeming accidents working out a plan?"

Question after question such as these ran, pell-mell, through Luke's mind. He wanted the truth—the truth about many things. How could he

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find it? Truth must be—where? The skies wore a veil impenetrable. But divine justice was throned beyond. Chaos was not king. Personally, he was sure it was so. The Church taught it; and, as Hilary had said, the Church could not teach wrong. But, oh for some reason for the faith! He sighed and yearned for an acceptable reason for it!

The truth! the truth! his heart cried out. The truth! the truth!

Luke was only beginning to enquire; yet already he knew something of the pain, not of doubt, but of wanting to know, of yearning to understand. Having bitten of the apple of the forbidden tree, he was hungry for more of the fruit. There was purpose in the counsel the monk had left with him, that he should keep to his dreams and let questioning be; but such counsel was not for him, it was not manly counsel. Better wrestle with mysteries, wrestle without hope of victory, than sleep among the mysteries and never realise there were mysteries.

Luke was baffled, of course; but even in those early moments of enquiry—when he rather made a catalogue of questions than enquired—he was passing from boyhood to intellectual manhood. The taste of the forbidden fruit, at least, puts an end to childhood.

Commencement of the Quest

Luke walked about the forest for a little while, to see that none of the swine was straying. During those minutes of peace the fever of enquiry left him; he only saw the glory of nature, and the much goodness in life. Here was gladness enough for soul and body! Earth gave of its plenty joyously, and was full of delights. The sky was clamorous with the songs of birds, the wood exultant with nature's multitudinous beauties. How sweet and beautiful in God's universal domain is this little green world! With zest and delight of mind Luke observed existence on that sunny, breezy, glorious afternoon.

He returned to his feast of contemplation. At least he was certain of this fragment of truth culled from the world-book of beauty—God ruled! Proclaimed also, in this exultant life, in yonder trees and flowers, in those joyous and confident bird-voices, was this part of the divine truth—God loved! Given that—a government of love over all things—and the rest was of no importance. He decided to speak of this to Ulf on the morrow. Might not he be able to help his friend in his quandary?

The thought about Ulf caused him to look again for the robin. It was perched on a low branch of the oak tree, piping at slow intervals. While Luke was watching, it flew from the bough.

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There was immediate catastrophe. As a veritable bolt from the blue, a hawk descended, and struck the bird. Luke rose and shouted. The hawk stayed neither to complete its stroke, nor to seize its prey; but, frightened by human interference, went. Ulf's feathered friend lay quivering—dead upon the ground!

It was the tragedy of an instant, and something more than that; for it came as a red footnote to the first page of Luke's speculations.

"God ruled! God loved!"—so, in youth's happy confidence, he had but moments ago been thinking. And here was an answer! How could an act of cruelty, of complete injustice, such as this, be permitted, if divine love really ruled? Here was purposeless pain and undeserved sudden death. How could they exist in a God-created, God-dominated world?

Cold despair swept over him. But, even then, his worst pain was for Ulf, because the robin being dead, his friend had for ever lost something of which he was fond.

Luke picked up the bird. Poor limp handful of clay and feathers! How different from what had been—so little a while before! Working with his fingers he hollowed a grave, and buried the fragment of ruined life. He was oppressed with the strangeness of things; of the mysteries called

Commencement of the Quest

death, and the experiences called life! New questions framed themselves and clamoured for reasonable answer. Why had a happy creature suddenly, cruelly, been deprived of life; and the world thereby made poorer for lack of its melody? Why? The truth! the truth!

But what did he mean by the truth? For long he puzzled at that basic question, till at last his brain, eagerly groping, found the definition. What he wanted to discover in his search for the truth, as he called it, was some manifestation of God's actual ruling in the world, some positive manifestation, open and evident to the simplest of enquiring minds.

Problems of all kinds beset him. For long he pondered, but could not probe them. At the back of his brain there reposed the certainty that all was right, that love was dominant in the universe, that mercy and justice reigned; but at present—difficulties predominated.

Deliberately, for that day, he gave up the problem. He called to his swine, and drove them home.

Through the night weird dreams haunted him; mind-fever held him. Mocking faces shone from the darkness, faded, were gone. In the eyes of every face was repeated his monosyllabic question—"Why?" On the lips of every one there was a sneer.

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Luke was awake before dawn. He went out of the hut in which Mause and he dwelt, and gazed at the burning stars. In his heart's doubt he gained comfort from them. They spoke to him of eternity, of what is immortal. For this little life has its absolute certainties. Birds are brought into existence now and dead to-morrow; death comes—to man as to birds—in multitudinous ways. The longest life is little more than a handful of days. But the stars—God's sentinels!—are always there—shining always, although clouds may for a while obscure them. But still—Ulf's robin-redbreast was dead; and Luke's question—the question of the dream-faces—was unanswered.

The uncertainty grew stronger as shuddering dawn advanced. He vowed to ask Ulf; and then to question Hilary. He must have some answer, good or bad, from one or both. If the man of the world could not comfort his heart and mind, there was the Churchman. If the monk could not answer he must continue to grope for the truth alone until he found it, or knew that it was definitely and undoubtedly beyond human scope.

Ulf did not come that day, but Hilary did, so Luke sought counsel from him. The monk listened with sympathy to all there was to tell, but could give no words of healing. The tragedy of the redbreast was no tragedy to him. To Luke,

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whose life had been spent in the woods, every breathing thing was a fragment of divine life; a bird as truly such a fragment as was a man; but to Hilary a bird was a bird only, of no more importance in the scheme of existence than a leaf or a beetle.

So Luke, in his search for truth, first tried Hilary, who, in the peculiar difficulty that had arisen, could not help. The monk was, however, eagerly anxious to keep that young soul for the Church; and begged Luke to consult other of the monks, and to brood patiently and prayerfully over what they had to say, for, as he argued, only the Church could help in that and all other soul-trouble.

“The innocent is asking for a mad martyrdom,” was his own secret, sad comment.

In the evening—after vespers—when the herd was pent, and he was free, Luke went to the monastery. With eager feet he began his search for truth. The mysterious ideal whose votary he had sworn to be, called to him with alluring voice, and baffled him.

For the first time in his life he hastened over the meadow, and through the cluster of oaks which stood between Mause's dwelling and the monastery, without regarding the bats, which, with shrill squeaks of happiness, circled above him, or

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the thick clusters of dog-daisies which starred the grass at his feet. They were details in that book of truth he was passionate to read, but he ignored them then; his enquiry was, for the time being, introspective.

He reached a side-portal, and tapped. A wicket slid aside; a pale face peered through the grating. Luke asked to see Brother Clement, whose reputation for wisdom and knowledge was wide, the favourite vanity of the community. He was admitted at once.

Hilary happened to be pacing along the corridor as the swineherd entered. The monk smiled on hearing that it was Clement whom Luke had asked to see, and pointed to the entrance of an additional chapel—dedicated to St. Hugo—which Luke obediently entered, while Hilary stayed to speak with the brother at the gate.

Luke knelt as soon as he was within, and began the saying of his circle of prayers. When they were finished, he continued to kneel there in a waking dream. Lights glimmered above and beside the altar. Out of the gloom a silvern representation of the Crucifixion shone dimly. There were, in front of him, other objects of adoration, devotion, or superstition: but he heeded them not. His eyes looked beyond the altar, beyond the chapel, beyond the world. Being the

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complete dreamer, there was no limitation to his imaginings. His speculations wandered through the universe.

In his simple-hearted exaltation, they ranged well towards the unthinkable. He was able—in his purity of soul and reverence—to realise something of the presence of God; but only and always as King of Love. Luke, in his natural innocence, was able to comprehend God as sympathetic Omniscience. He could not conceive God as other than completely helpful and loving; and yet, in perfect reverence still, he was asking his soul insistently the awful question—How could the all-knowing, all-powerful God of Love permit such a fact of unmerited, unnecessary suffering and slaughter, as his eyes that day had witnessed?

Luke in his communion with the eternities was unaware of the passing of many minutes. Clement, whom he had come to consult, did not appear or send any summons or message, yet Luke was unconscious of the neglect. In the dreadful silence of the chapel he forgot Brother Clement, and every other human pawn in life's puzzling game. His mind was pondering the problems of heaven, and had no need, in that hour of exalted reverie, for puppets of earth.

Weary with gazing at the altar-glimmer, he

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closed his eyes, and sank forward, his face hidden in his hands. For the little moment he seemed to lose grip of his personality. His subliminal self called to him with a voice, which his governing senses had hitherto made mute.

“ Peruel! ” whispered the voice of his soul.

Luke's lapse into swoon-sleep was merely momentary, yet within that fragment of time he had heard a strange, new, mysterious word, and seen visions of blurred brightness. Almost immediately complete consciousness returned; he was staring at white candles with their points of yellow flame, and the faded, ornate, altar-furniture. The voice and visions of the momentary lapse were forgotten as he re-awaked. He was Luke the swineherd once more, conscious of his ignorance, asking still the fool's and the wise man's question—“ Why? ”

But although the vision-voice was forgotten, other voices were speaking within him, putting into his mind many perplexing thoughts, rousing that intolerable dragon, doubt.

“ How foolish is prayer! As if a man crouching on his knees in front of a crucifix or painted image is any the better for mouth-work!—A God of love? What does that mean when human beings, and beings less than human, live to be wronged, and die to be forgotten? Where is

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omnipotent love there? — Life after death? Phew! Look in a coffin! Life after death! Phew!"

Such were some of the thoughts which tumbled through Luke's mind. He abhorred and resisted them. He knew they were not really his ideas—it was as if evil personalities were making a play-thing of his brain. Still they distressed him exceedingly. He felt the full burden of responsibility because of them. They were of his mind, therefore, surely, part of his personality! So even while he resisted them, he suffered grievously because of them—they were his.

The troublesome thoughts not only continued, but became every moment more annoyingly insistent. The struggle to suppress them added to the agony. In his perplexity, he prayed passionately for light and the strengthening of his faith; but during that hour of trial, in that place of prayer, it seemed as if the tempters had no real spiritual opponent to cope with them; they could perplex and torment the swineherd untroubled by angel enemy.

So, in mocking throng, fiends ranged behind him; and answered his agonized appeals with still more perplexing thoughts. Luke had no knowledge of their nearness to him. He felt, indeed, much alone in that hour of doubt's darkness;

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but still fought steadily against the assaults of the invisible.

The torture at last became so intense that his physical being protested against the strain. He sprang to his feet with a moan on his lips, fled from the chapel, and, heedless of the call of the gatekeeper, passed out of the monastery, making no pause in his flight until he was again in Mause's dwelling.

When in the end he did pause, it was to feel profoundly ashamed and weak; defeated, a coward.

He could not see himself as the angels saw him.

CHAPTER VI

ULF'S ANSWER

THE evil thoughts which had occurred to Luke in the chapel caused him to be conscious of profound unworthiness, a sense of humiliation accentuated during the cool meditations of the morrow. A very brown-mooded swineherd tended the pigs and drove them afield that morning.

So sad was he, that he prayed to have loneliness during the day, that he might indulge the luxury of brooding over his problems, and have an opportunity of fighting the doubts which now mercilessly beset him.

He hoped to be lonely. Life's lottery brought him the reverse. The customary solitude of the woods was invaded by strangers of the least looked-for kind. Ulf, too, it was who unwillingly brought them.

The jester had been proceeding to their usual meeting-place when he stumbled on a party of girls, who, with frolic and infinite shrillness, had been decking themselves with large white daisies strung about green trailers torn from the hedges

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and thickets. They were happy country girls, thoughtlessly enjoying life's spell of laughter before household care should claim them for its own.

A fool in motley was always game for the sportive. So Ulf, who had more than a fair proportion of kindness in his nature, after giving them food for mirth with several sayings, permitted himself to be harnessed with green things, to wear a crown of June poppies, and be driven, capering, through the avenues towards the monastery. One of the girls walked in front, wielding Ulf's bauble, and strutting like an over-important major-domo; the remaining five walked hand in hand, the outer two holding leafy reins, while they all at the height of shrill voices sang country songs.

Ulf danced, fully entering into their mood of irresponsibility, until Luke was before him. The girls stopped their singing, looked more or less disdainfully at swine and swineherd, and were not intending to stay; but Ulf insisted on going to his friend.

Luke appeared not pleased at the interruption, though he was glad to greet Ulf, to whom he breathlessly told of the death of the bird.

A cloud passed fleetly over the jester's face. He shook himself free from the creepers, but

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the shrunken crown of poppies still encircled his cockscomb.

"Pack home, you melody makers," he said, as he snatched his bauble from the girl who held it.

"Saucy fool!" cried one with a flash of petulant anger.

"He wants to gossip with the pigs!" said another, and giggled; while a third swept an impudent curtsy to Luke, and strutted away, her nose in the air, a sneer on her upper lip.

"Silly wench!" said Ulf gruffly, "you are not worthy to breathe the same air with him!"

"You forget your manners, fool!" she answered shortly. "Dirty company has ruined your judgment!"

"Dirty motley, dirty swineherd, dirty pigs!" jeered another, and the six laughed in chorus.

"Run away home, princesses," Ulf growled, "I prefer the company of pork!"

"Pip, pig, pig!" they cried, taunting Ulf; and, going a little way, pelted him with old fallen fir-cones, till one of the larger swine, happening to go towards them, sent them running, laughing and shrieking, away. For a little while the sound of their excited voices disturbed the serenity of the wood.

Ulf supposed Luke might be troubled by the girl's careless insolence; but, in fact, he thought

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nothing of it. The social superiority of every one else in his environment had taught him from the earliest to accept a pretty humble estimate of himself, and his mind just then had concern with things of greater importance. But amongst them the personal would intrude. Luke must be thinking of an ideal and the real—of Alys and those clamorous careless lasses.

Although his opinion of the circumstances of life was not what it had been, he was no less a visionary and idealist; indeed, to drain his mind of its dreams would have been as ineffective as were the efforts of Loki to drink the sea. The sudden appearance and departure of the feather-headed maidens had thrown sharply into the midst of his meditations the recollections of Alys. Their boisterous presence seemed to release her from the abstract; they made her real, and Alys, real—where was she? Why was she not a more potent presence in his life? Was she always to be but a sweet shadow of dreams?

Ulf recurred to the death of the bird: his regret found expression in straight rebellious speech.

“Of all the birds in the wood that that one should be chosen! What a tyrant it is these monks make their groans to!” he spoke with a savageness unusual to him. “That little maker

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of music and happiness has been killed wantonly. It is the same right through, from sky to dust. Everything worth anything is ground to powder by some unseen merciless might. Love! Justice! Truth!—Truth! If truth ever lived, she was smothered as soon as she was born. What a world it is! Sorry and rotten! Every song is a death-song. Every flower has blight in its heart. The skeleton is the most lasting part of a creature's being. Immortality! Fustian! ”

Luke looked up at his friend, who was, he knew, suffering. But despite his own recent agony of uncertainty, he felt, in face of this challenge, constrained to fight truth's battle.

“ It is no good railing,” said he. “ Compared with the powers unseen, we are such little things. Life is a big mystery. There are wise and holy men who have the key to it. Some day we shall know the truth and its meaning.”

Ulf shook his head impatiently.

“ That day is no day. Some day is never. Some day is death's day. We puzzle our fool brains over imagined mysteries, then die and are dust—earth for the grass to grow in, which the beasts eat. We bother our brains in the sunlight, only in the end to be bones in a coffin. Truth's in a coffin, bones beautifying a shroud! ”

“ No, truth is not. Truth is where death is not;

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and life is our opportunity for finding it," Luke answered; and then ventured into further fields philosophic. "Why else should I be able to think? Can that pig think?"

"It isn't such a fool as to think," Ulf rejoined, looking savagely at the unoffending monster. "It lives the wise life: eats, drinks, sleeps, and wastes no time in praying, or cleaning itself. Besides, why shouldn't the pig think? It has similar faculties and the same senses as we have. Of course it thinks, and thinking, wisely sets its mind to looking for truffles. I greet you, brother," he added, smiling queerly, as he gave the grubbing swine a gentle kick.

"Irony runs away with you, Ulf. You know that, whatever its faculties may be, a pig is not man's brother."

"Why not? All creatures are cousins. Man, the pig, and the angels, are all distant relations."

"Has a pig a soul, as man has?"

"Soul! What is soul? How do you know we have souls? I can see my feet, pull my nose, feel the beat of my heart; but I cannot see or feel my soul!"

"Or your thoughts!"

"No, that's a fair hit! You are a shrewdling, Luke; but 'tis shrewdness wasted among these snouters!"

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“Further, Ulf,” cried Luke, warming with the joy of confident controversy, “you don’t live consistently with your own gloomy creed. You prate here about truth being dead with Death, and talk to Lilith about immortality, and happiness, and health after death.”

“That’s to comfort her. Who would talk of immortality if it weren’t to comfort ill folk and frightened children?”

“No one would consecrate a lie for such a purpose!”

“Would not any one, young oracle?” said Ulf smiling, as he seated himself on the grass. “You are a wise lad talking sage fragments like a seventy-year-old, whose brains are not rimey with the frost of age. Where did you discover this fount of priestly wisdom?”

“Since the bird died; even before that—since you spoke with Hilary of truth I have been thinking of and searching for the truth. When I am alone doubt lies heavily on me, and all the things I long to believe in are lost behind clouds. But when you dogmatise and speak as if life were one lie——”

“As kindness and the priests to comfort frightened ones have assuredly made it.”

“Then my soul is roused to opposition.”

“Roused to opposition! Your wisdom is

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merely the ordinary infirmity of man—obstinacy; and not the reasonableness of the philosopher. Your mind left to itself says ‘Nay’; till Mistress Prejudice steps in, and in the splendid feminine manner screams ‘Yea!’ and that’s enough for the youth with the obstinacy—the wisdom of seventy.”

“Not prejudice steps in; but——”

“Your good angel, I suppose!”

“I was going to say the confidence that God watches and rules; that He is truth, whatever men do and say.”

“I wish I could share that confidence and be assured that the Church would keep such simple faith. The religious are always speaking of wonderful miracles performed by saints and the relics of saints. I wish I could see one of those miracles performed. I have never seen such done, though I have kept my ears and eyes astrain for them, and every village has forty legends of deeds of miracle performed just forty years before. I would give an eye to see one blind man receive sight. I ask a priest why I can never witness such a miracle, and he answers: ‘Have faith! Have faith!’ It is like asking me to shut my eyes in the hope of seeing the sun at midnight.”

Luke was thoughtfully silent for a little while. The arguments Ulf urged were new to him; and,

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false or true, stimulated his mind. Here, good or evil, indirectly supplied, was some of the information he sought.

“ And what does Father Priest mean by faith? ” Ulf continued.

“ Ay, what does he mean? ” said Luke, accepting the other's quiet challenge.

“ Why, blind belief—blind belief in what the Church rules and teaches.”

“ The Church is the surest guide we have,” Luke asserted, though only recently he had been in doubt on that very issue.

“ Is it? What a blessed blind confidence we have! Your memory is that of a thirsty seven-year-old. Here are questions! What constitutes the Church—the teaching, ruling Church? The monks and priests on earth and phantoms in heaven. Where are your teachers in the monastery? There is Hilary. You asked him about the truth. What said he? Did he satisfy you? Not one whit! And the other wonders of St. Dunstan's? Where is the helper among them? I have at some time or other seen and spoken with every one of them, from my lord Abbot to my lord doorkeeper, and not a man of them but is wrapped in his own private robe of vanity, foolishness, and ignorant dogmatism. Go to each of them, Luke, and ask your frank questions. Ponder on the

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answers they give. Bah! They are blind beggars, each insisting that he can see best—lame dogs, every one boasting that he has the finest store of strength and wholeness—windy dogmatizing mouths! Go to them, Lucas. The blind guides will be glad to lead you.”

The swineherd was roused by this invective.

“ I will,” said he.

“ Ask each one for the key to the gate of truth.”

“ I will! ”

“ You will! poor wanderer in the wilderness! Looking for truth in the clouded pit of lies. Ask Brother Clement! ”

“ That will I.”

“ And receive—a learned discourse on whether two angels can occupy the same space, or on the spiritual marriage of Cain. Truth’s most loving murderer was the Father of the Schoolmen! Then you ask Brother Benedict! ”

“ You advise me? ”

“ Advise you, poor simpleton squatting on a mare’s nest! You should wear this motley. Benedict! Brother Benedict! the poet whose heart is swathed in fantasies, who loves to limn mimic saints in the holy books, to weave many coloured traceries into wonderful letters on parchment, and scroll glories on vellum leaves. You will ask him for truth, and receive in return, five

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legends. You yearn for life-giving truth, and he tells you how St. Lucy, when she was testifying to her faith, could not be torn from where she stood by the united strength of oxen—and a hundred other unhelpful incredible wonders. Legends are lovely—I make them myself—but we can't live on them; you and I want the truth—the truth; and will never get it. Then, still earnest in our pilgrimage, we go to Brother John. What says Brother John? ”

“ What does Brother John say? ”

“ Brother John loves his cup and his platter—I will remember only the superior aspect of Brother John. But again and again he loves the flowing contents of his cup. He drinks, hiccups a happy sigh from the depths of a grateful heart, and murmurs: ‘ God love the man who brewed this sack! ’ Something like that is his answer to the seeker after truth. Then, weary and properly disgusted, perhaps now a little bit angry, we go to Brother Jerome. He is afraid of nobody, reveres nothing; answers simple enquiries with a sneer. Wounded, we grow passionate and clamour for the truth. He sneers again, curls a cruel lip, and tells us to mind our pigs. I wonder whether one day Jerome will be canonised! Finally, weary of underlings, Lucas the truth-seeker goes to the Abbot.”

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“ And the Abbot? ”

“ I think I will leave that to his most reverend Mightiness! I wash my hands of my lord Abbot! And now I wash my hands of all melancholy cogitation, and go to say good-day to Lilith. Drive home the pigs, and come to me there. I will sing you a song which I made myself. It is about a man who swallowed the moon and found himself sailing round, round, and round the world. It isn't half as mad in its meaning—though I, its maker, cannot and would not unravel its mystery—as the answers to your questions will be. Hasten, Luke, I will sing the song; you shall join in the chorus which follows hard on every line. It is ‘Fol-de-rol.’ Do you think you can remember that? You might practise it while the monks are explaining, and so punctuate their sapient discourse.”

Ulf hurried away, the crown of faded poppies still dangling about his cockscornb.

CHAPTER VII

LILITH COMPLETES THE PROBLEM

LUKE did not seek wisdom from the monks that evening after all, but followed Ulf's advice, and when the swine were safely housed, went to the home of the sick girl, Lilith.

There was, however, none of the promised song. He found Ulf a changed man. There was no occasion for melody or mirth. The jester, the fisherman and his wife, had other occupation for their thoughts.

Lilith was ill, very ill; suffering excess of pain, struggling desperately for breath. Fever gripped her, weakness laid its sloth upon her, despair lived in her mind and heart. Hopeless now of living, she was hopeless also at the thought of death.

When Luke reached the hut, he found confusion there. Yorg was standing by the door, staring at the sky, grumbling furiously. His emotion found expression in jerked, sour words.

The wife was on the verge of noisy tears. With nervous hands she twisted and untwisted her apron. Her hair, fallen loose from its fastenings,

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hung about her face and ears, untidily, in tangles.

Ulf was the calm one of the three. He knelt by Lilith's bed and murmuring words of soothing, bathed the girl's hot forehead.

Luke's coming brought help to the anxious three. The fisherman greeted him as usual. "Heh, Luke," he cried, and stumped into the little room to stare under frowning brows at his suffering daughter.

The mother at sight of the new-comer lapsed into the comfort of unnecessary tears.

"You are welcome, Luke," Ulf said. "Go to the monastery for a leech."

Luke turned and ran. While he was running the pain-afflicted face of Lilith—hopelessness and fear alight in the eyes—haunted his mind. Never before had he seen human being in agony. Remembrance of the picture of pain just witnessed appalled him. But, during those moments of stress, loyalty to his friend was stronger even than pity for the stricken girl. Luke felt certain that Ulf loved her, as she assuredly loved him.

As he ran he thought; and slowly, surely, thought drifted into prayer.

Luke prayed that Lilith might be restored to health: then that she might be spared much pain: then that if for some incomprehensible, super-

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human reason there must be pain in that little community, it might be transferred from Lilith to himself.

That was Luke's prayer, prayed for the sake of Ulf.

As he ran, he raised hand to heaven as though to grasp God's answer.

Within ten minutes he was at the monastery, summoning the monk reputed to be especially skilled in questions of bodily health and illness—Brother Andrew.

One glance at the patient was sufficient to suggest to the reverend leech the prime remedy and principal palliative in his pharmacopœia.

"She must be bled," he said, and forthwith bled her. The cupping did not lessen the fever or diminish the pain. The patient continued to moan and grow weaker. Ulf's words and his careful, considerate hands were what chiefly helped her. She sank rapidly.

The watchers waited. Luke was strangely fascinated by the life and death struggle. Only Ulf spoke, of smiling hope and forced happiness. She—too weak now to feel pain—fastened her gaze on him. Her eyes looked him through searchingly, as though she endeavoured to read the one unexpressed secret that bound them. Gradually her face was lighted with a smile: it

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seemed that her weakness and pain were vanquished.

The end was evidently near, so Brother Andrew ceased to be doctor and became priest. He prepared for the last offices. He motioned Ulf to stand aside. The jester hesitated, but realising the priestly intentions, was about to obey, when Lilith eagerly gripped his wrist.

"I must remain here, Father," he said.

"Then kneel," the monk commanded; and Ulf, still holding her hand, knelt, as did the others.

Luke was, during those minutes, beyond thought of prayer. He could only unintelligently stare. A deep, vague sense of pity was in his heart: in his mind were insistent, intolerable questions—What was the meaning of this problem of pain? Why did a harmless girl thus suffer? Why should guiltless Ulf and her parents be struck this cruel blow?

A short time only was necessary for the monk's practised lips to say the final words of ghostly comfort and spiritual appeal; then again, he slipped to the background to pray and to press his beads, while with expressionless eyes he gazed at the wall beyond the deathbed.

The crisis came suddenly. The girl shivered, as though icy fingers had touched her. Sharp pain convulsed her body. She half-rose and,

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frenzied, threw her arm about Ulf's neck, clinging to him convulsively.

"Ulf, one day!—I wait!"

So she died. Ulf closed her eyelids; and like a man in a maze, composed her hair, crossed her arms on her breast; and then, giving no word voice, went hastily out of the cottage. The mother at once began to make noisy mourning, while Yorg tried, unsuccessfully, to hide the fact that he was crying.

Brother Andrew for some time longer continued his prayers.

Luke finding his presence useless, went after Ulf, and walked with him under the trees by the side of the lake. Each brought closer by this catastrophe, was thinking dark thoughts, too deep for words. In the jester's heart was agony and angry revolt. He grudged the stolen life. His grief found expression in fiery wrath. He hated with especial intensity all things religious: Heaven and the visible, invisible Church his heart railed against silently. So in deep bitterness Ulf mourned.

With Luke it was different. He was stunned by the shock of death. It was, practically, a new experience to him. He remembered Kelp dead; but there was infinite difference between the circumstances of that ending and of this. Kelp,

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who died without pain, was a tired man, content to go. Luke also had been too young then to feel deep regret; and what sorrow the boy mourner felt was salved by the fact of his succession to the proud though very humble responsibilities of his foster-father.

This death was different.

Luke grasped his comrade's hand, wishing to soothe his evident anguish, and so for a long while they walked along unregarded woodland ways.

Ulf found speech at last. "She is dead—dead!" he exclaimed. "I shall never speak fables for her comfort again. Lilith! O Lilith—she is dead!"

Ulf's broken appeal brought blessed tears to both of them. Luke grasped his friend's shoulder; instinctively their arms went about each other in affectionate embrace.

So they parted for that day, while overhead the stars, indifferent to human pains and problems, were beginning to pierce the amber of evening.

CHAPTER VIII

AN APPEAL TO WISDOM

THE death of Lilith, through some subtle, indirect association, renewed in the mind of Luke more vivid impressions of Alys. That myth-maiden—she was in fact little more than that—though elusive, was quite real to him, governing many of his thoughts and aspirations.

Years had passed since the visit of Alys; Luke had with unloverlike contentment not sought to see her since. Yet his concept of her personality was so impressed on his mind that its phantasm had become to him almost as real as her speaking presence would have been. Like many another—though no other in Argovie could be quite compared with him, as all others were more mundane-minded than he—he was in love, deeply in love; with a mind-thing, a dream-being.

Then from thinking of Alys, his mind proceeded to the remembrance of the chattering girls. The contrast! Six giggling caricatures of Woman the divine! Yet were they living beings, born to

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carry burdens and wield influence as effective—if they liked—as any human influence could be; and they regarded their coming destiny no more than a sparrow thinks of to-morrow.

By their side the young visionary put Alys—perfection! the wonder-girl!—and then, that other type—Lilith, the maid of misfortune; who after a life of illness had died, disappointed, in pain. Why had she been born to endure such misery and trouble? Where was the necessity for such purposeless sacrifice? It was the old recurring question!—Why?

He came upon two monks walking through the wood, talking earnestly. He hesitated at first to intrude on them; but insistent anxiety to discover his quarry, the truth, impelled him to address them. The Church was its guardian. Her representatives, if they could do so, must tell. He hurried towards the brethren. They were Clement, whom he had called at the monastery unavailingly to consult, and Andrew. With the exception of his trusted Hilary, there were none more likely than these to help him in the wise, kind way. So he told himself.

“You called at the monastery to see me, but went before I could come to you,” said Clement, with severity.

“I am sorry, Father. I was sorely tempted

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with horrible, doubting thoughts, and could bear the suspense no longer."

"You fled!"

"I fled. It seemed as if I was flying from fiends. I was weak, Father; and afterwards was ashamed."

Clement stood regarding him thoughtfully. "It is the strong soul that is worst assailed. But you should not have fled. Did you not dip your fingers in holy water, and make the sign of the cross?"

"No, my troubles were to me too insistent, difficult, too heavy, for them to be relieved by holy water. I wanted then, and I want now, reasons, helpful reasons against my doubts."

Brother Andrew had pursed his lips and was looking sharply at the swineherd.

"Do you speak lightly of the practices of Churchmen?" he asked severely.

"No, no, Father," Luke replied hurriedly. "How can I say it? I am troubled daily with horrible doubts, thoughts which I hate keep worrying my mind. I believe—always believe; yet—why should I so believe?"

Then Clement of the kind voice and considerate spirit with a gesture intervened. Luke's earnestness and candour appealed to him. He realised that this was no ordinary mortal whose enquiries would be satisfied with patronage and small

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change. But he said nothing. His silence was an invitation to speech.

At once Luke plunged into his simple story, as he paced beside them towards the monastery.

“All that I have in this world—even my life,” he began, “I owe to the monks and good folk of this monastery. I was a foundling, abandoned in the pigsty. Who my father and mother were I do not know, possibly never shall know. Whoever and whatever they were—noble or base, rich or poor—is all one to me now. I was a deserted infant, only a few hours old, when Kelp and Mause found me in the pigsty and lovingly tended me. I rose from that cradle to be swineherd; and from you and the reverend Fathers, my protectors; from the menials of the monastery also—they too, my masters—I have received everything which I can call mine.

“Except my thoughts and dreams. Them God sent me. Dreams have always been coming to me—in the woods and meadows, under the trees, among the flowers and grasses, when it was sunshine, when it was starshine—everywhere, anywhere, so long as there was solitude or the company of that one friend whose coming changed it to solitude enriched. I have seen visions. I have enjoyed dreams. I tell you this, Fathers, not because they have to do with my present soreness

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of heart and mind, but because from them you may know that I did not waste my earlier hours in sloth."

"The mind does not rust in brave dreams," remarked Clement.

"But on that basis of visions unconsciously was being prepared a thought-building which experience of sorrows has now erected suddenly."

"The sermon grows lengthy!" muttered Andrew.

"I lived in the full knowledge that God was all love and all power: all power, yet—if it were possible to be so—more love than power. I believed that all existence was thronged with, and dominated by, His love and power—that everywhere the angels were bound to be triumphant; that friends and fiends and evil men might for a little while, in the darkness tempting weakness, destroy some virtue; but that with the return of the light and presence of the angels, the wrong would come to be surely righted. That was my faith a little while ago.

"Then a question was asked in my presence by a wise and trusted comrade—the friend of my life. What is truth? was the question. For the first time, so, I learned there was not one certain answer to all the enquiries of men, and that the answer of the Church to every question which

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honesty might ask, which fallible men on earth must be entitled to ask, was not entirely acceptable, because it answered not out of knowledge but out of faith.

“ That discovery was to me like a new trumpet-note sounding from a pit of silence. A hundred questions crowded my mind, some of which my eyes and heart could answer; others are not answered yet, perhaps will not be answered till my mind is out of the flesh. But these, Fathers, are the most important. Will you give me your assistance and help me to find the comforting, satisfying answer which must be in the Church’s keeping, if the Church really is God’s presence on earth? ”

“ The Church really is God’s presence on earth,” echoed Andrew with the voice of confident faith. But Luke would not to interrupted.

“ These are some of the questions for which I strive to find answers. If God is love, how is it there is pain and purposeless cruelty in the world? If God is all-powerful, why is that purposeless wrong-doing not prevented by Him? ”

“ The answer,” said Clement slowly, “ is that this earth is not all the journey. Wrong done now is punished in the hereafter.”

“ Yes, yes; that is a reply. But in the case of a bird cruelly slaughtered——”

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“ Oh, a bird! ” commented the monk, thoughtfully. “ I was thinking of humanity and the soul of man.”

“ Here is my problem, Father. I hope you will help me to a right decision. The friend of whom I have spoken loved a tame bird—his love and care had tamed it, though it lived free in this wood. I saw that robin struck by a hawk; after a little fluttering it died. The bird harmed nothing, and with its gladness gave joy to my friend. Why should it be wantonly slaughtered, and before that, even only for moments, suffer pain? ”

“ Are you not making a great deal out of very little? ” answered Clement thoughtfully. “ There is pain throughout the earth—man as well as the creatures feel it. I cannot deny that there is much wanton cruelty and consequent suffering in this life. But after life, is there not peace—for the virtuous? ”

“ For the bird ? ”

“ Possibly for the bird.”

“ This may be little, Father, but it means much to me. You say, ‘ possibly for the bird.’ You do not—you cannot—speak with certainty. This little difficulty is the root, the pivot, of the whole problem. It is all based on an ‘ if.’ You, Father, as the wisest man in a monastery which stands for

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light in the eyes of so many of us—oh, I wish you would indignantly deny that God could passively permit cruelty even to the small and weak, from birds to men and women——”

“I do deny it!” said Brother Andrew vehemently.

“And satisfy me—Father, my soul yearns for it—with some sufficient reason.”

Brother Andrew snorted indignantly. Only the respect he, and all, felt for Clement prevented his rioting in denunciatory phrases. It puzzled him to find Clement—who could meet on their own ground and vanquish the most cunning of the rhetorical Schoolmen of the day—attending with curious respect to the more than doubtful arguments of a pig-herd.

“Ah, Luke,” said Clement at last, “do not forget that we are men, that the wisest of us is only a little released from the ignorance wherewith we were dowered at birth. The world is swathed in mystery. Only little by little can man pierce the mystery—to find still more mystery beyond it—infinite, inviolable. Reason is a blessed thing, but its range is limited. Reason at best does little to help us discover the hidden heart of man. How can we hope, by its means only, to fathom the infinite heart of God?”

Luke was impressed by this prudent and modest

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statement of Brother Clement. A great gladness was within him, because he had discovered a man, who, finding difficulties, did not shut his eyes against them, but received them, considered them fully, and still could hold the faith. Luke was gratified by Clement's spirit of sympathy which must be akin to his own; akin to every one's who had affection for others. His yearning for light was a yearning for the realization of the reign of love, and not, in effect, destructive. But the monk had avoided the question he had directly asked. Luke did not overlook the omission; but said nothing about it.

It was Brother Andrew who disturbed the placidity which Clement's diplomacy had produced.

"It does no good to be trying to find out what is not to be found out," he said in a tone similar to that adopted by Clement. "What the Church teaches, that you may believe. What the Church does not teach, it is as well not to enquire about. Adam and Eve were happy until they ate of the tree of knowledge."

"Ay, Father, but it is not happiness, it is the truth that I seek."

"Be content then with happiness and leave the truth to wiser men!"

"I cannot now, Father. It is too late. There

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is no happiness in living without thinking and trying to find the truth about life and the after-life. That is the pig's existence. I am a man."

"You are very like a fool!" cried Andrew. "Remember Adam and Eve. They were curious after hidden things. They sinned through greed for knowledge. Their eyes were opened; they lost Paradise. Think you that when compelled to labour and know want in the wilderness they did not lament the happy ignorance lost? Be wise, fool—and avoid the pains of the wilderness."

Luke grew excited through the monk's upbraiding. He would have answered hotly, forgetting the relative positions of Andrew and himself, had not the diplomatic Clement once more intervened.

"Think carefully of my brother's caution," he said. "It is customary for youth to rush full-tilt at things, whether it be the young knight charging an enemy, or the young thinker facing problems. You have time and can afford to wait. You will then see behind a great deal that now seems all perplexity. You exaggerate the importance of the death of this bird. Remembering what the Scriptures have taught me, I can tell you that even the mysterious cruelty of a bird's death may be left till one can read more surely the full meaning of the mercy of God."

"The death of the bird is not all, Father," cried

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Luke. "It is only a minor difficulty. There are many greater than that. Would that it were the only one! There is the death of Lilith—a girl who died young after years of constant pain and——"

Clement interrupted him. "Be content to let the difficulties rest till you are wiser. Pray to God for guidance: avoid discomforting and destroying thoughts."

"How can I? I must think, and through thinking find problems. It is wisdom which explains them—that is why I have come to the Church, to you."

"You need not fear thinking if you constantly pray also; if through thought the devils assail you, pray; and the saints and angels will help."

"I do not fear thinking. I do not know that I fear anything—temptation or anything earthly. But I do want to know and believe in what is just and true."

Clement made no reply, perhaps his patience was exhausted. He turned his back abruptly on Luke, and walked away.

Andrew seeing his brother's action, plucked up courage to speak roughly to Luke.

"Swineherd, you are foolish to babble as you do. It is not for you to question and ask for answers. What does it matter if you are lost in

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mazes and do not get the truth? You must believe what you are told, as other men do; and if you do not like that, must disbelieve in silence."

Luke was somewhat stunned by this outburst. He bowed his head, submissive. He knew his humble circumstances. He was subordinate truly, but—his heart ached with sharp agony at this result of his entreaties.

Clement, however, hearing Andrew's outburst, turned to say not unkindly: "If you have other difficulties, Luke, on which you wish for light, seek audience of the Abbot. Ask only him, henceforth."

The two monks returned to the monastery.

Luke, leaning against the rough rind of an elm-tree, watched them until they passed into the darkness. Then came to him all the force of the blow which disappointment, caused by their counsel, had produced. Andrew's words had stunned him: not till now did he feel the resultant pain.

In that dim hour, when depression was heavy upon him, he heard again the evil voices which haunted and beset him in the chapel. Ear of man could not have heard them, for they were mute: but silent though they were, they clamoured loudly within the channels of his brain. His mind—his nerves—were racked and tortured by them. He

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turned shivering, and raised arms imploringly to the young stars gleaming from the velvet blue night-sky.

"God help me! God help me!" his lips muttered. The fact of making the appeal brought relief for one moment. Immediately afterwards the tempter's gibes and sneers and insolent queries recommenced to torture his haunted brain; and he saw or imagined, faintly white in the shadows of the wood, the pain-stricken face of Lilith, with hopeless despair in the eyes.

He was hard tempted. It seemed as if the being within himself—his soul—implored for a spoken profession of no faith. He felt strongly that to have said three words of blasphemy would have given him physical relief. He was near indeed to the commission of the sin; but he set his lips and sank on his knees thinking, thinking a passionate prayer for succour.

"God help me! God help me!" was the repeated appeal. Heart as well as mind, limbs as well as soul, seemed unanimous in expressing the prayer.

Then he had answer, though he saw it not: eyes of flesh being blind to the world of the spirits. Luke, fallen prone, was lying on his face amid dank grass and dead leaves. So exhausted was he through this trial and the subsequent spiritual

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effort, that he could do nothing but lie there and be conscious of his great weakness.

So he saw it not. He saw nothing of the fiends who had followed him, and scourged him with the serpent-whips of doubt. Nor the one angel, armed and magnificent, flashing with the golden brightness of the powers of virtue, whose sudden appearance drove the enemies in panic away.

Luke was blind to this comedy in the invisible. Man knows so little of the realities. All he was conscious of was his own unworthiness. Throughout that period of sorrowing impotence, he hungered—eagerly, more eagerly than ever—for the truth about the true.

CHAPTER IX

“PERUEL! PERUEL!”

It was several days before Luke saw Ulf again. The jester stayed at home with his grief; he mourned in secret; whereas Luke was unable to go far from the demesnes of the monastery. So for a while they did not meet.

When the sorrow in Ulf's heart was in large measure subdued, and no longer fiery pain, he resumed his wanderings and came to the swineherd. For a time the two remained silent, though in silence they held communion. It seemed as if mind spoke to mind, needing no framework of words. Then Ulf's indignation found voice.

“Is it not all a lie?—a sardonic mockery? Where is the love, justice, mercy, power, in this?”

“Hush, Ulf,” counselled Luke, startled by the passion of his friend's outburst.

“The life we lead is built on a base of lies. Things happen sans rhyme and reason, because there is no guiding hand where a good hand should be guiding. Accidents happen; and men blindly call them fate! Here, again, is pain and death where life and happiness were more fitting.

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Where was the wisdom and purpose of Lilith's going? " Ulf proceeded further along the dark pathway. " God is the name men give to chance, because men are frightened victims of chance. They are gamblers all, and think to propitiate blind accident by giving it another name and founding a system of virtues and persons to fit their dreams. Fools! fools! Now Lilith is gone! I shall never see Lilith again; and all the memories I have of her must be of a girl in pain, to be for ever afterwards—dust! Why should she die while so many thousand slimy creatures who babble and waste the earth are allowed to live? Why? The answer is bitterly easy. Because there is no justice, no ruling power—no God!—it is all a scramble. The gross live and flourish: the weak and unselfish go to the grave! Life is based upon a black system of lies—lies! "

" Poor Ulf! " said Luke, leaning over and placing a hand gently on his comrade's shoulder. " I know you have suffered, and am glad you let me share your mourning: but do not rail at things too wildly. I question too—and have questioned the monks——"

" The monks!—hooded hypocrites! "

" I have asked them as the minds and voices of Mother Church."

" Mother Church! Ah, God! "

“ Peruel ! Peruel ! ”

“ To help me find an answer to the question you are asking. As yet I have not found the answer——”

“ It is all one lie ! ”

“ But I shall find it. When I am alone I have every doubt. Plain things seem so difficult, and man’s faith mere credulity. I yearn for light that I may discover the truth; but always in my thought, as, alas, in my enquiries of the monks, I am baffled. Yet when you speak as you have spoken, defiantly, I feel confident that what is best in our hopes is true. Such confidence is part of my being. I shall continue to ask and endeavour to discover as long as I have thoughts and a tongue. To find truth is difficult: but she lives and will show herself some day.”

Ulf made no answer then. He sat crouching forward, his eyes fixedly set on a brown spot in the turf before him. A sad face it was that peered from out of the fool’s rumpled hood. There were about the eyes lines absent a week before. The weariness often evident in his face was now accentuated.

Presently he put hand in pouch and brought out bread-crumbs, which he scattered over the grass till the expectant birds came and pecked at them. In the depths of his pain he had not forgotten the birds.

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Diversion came in unexpected guise. An old woman, grumbling and muttering, shuffled along the road over which Luke's unknown parents had shambled during the night of his birth.

Her clothes were faded rags. Her body was bent with age. Her face covered with wrinkles, and very filthy. Her bare head was partly bald; what hair clung to the skull was dark at the roots with dirt. Her form shook with a palsy. The hand clutching the pole that helped her feeble progress was gnarled and thin. But her eyes were keen. The light in them, whether of sanity or madness, was far from quenched. She did not notice Luke and Ulf until quite close to them. Then she stood and scowled, while her sunken lips mumbled.

"Peace be with you, mother," was Ulf's greeting.

"Peace be with *me*? Are ye mocking me, rascals?" She raised her voice to an angry screech, and shook a bent finger at them. "I know you, ah, the men of this cruel day! I know you only too well! For seventy-seven years have I lived, and never since I can remember has the sun gone down on a day which has not been hurt with a curse or a cruelty. Peace be with *me*! Oh, mocking fool! I would love to scratch you and hurt those artful eyes."

“ Peruel ! Peruel ! ”

“ Peace, mother, we wish you no harm,” said Ulf again.

“ Liar ! ” she answered instantly. “ You are men, therefore you must mean harm. All men do. They dub me witch ! Say I have the evil eye ! Say that with foul glances and incantations I kill cattle, spread disease, give illnesses to children—ah ! There is no name, no lie, too ugly or foul to hurl at an old woman—in these days of noisy knighthood and jumping chivalry, of sweet and holy religion and love of wastrel women.”

Luke walked over to her, and said gently, “ Mother, you wrong us when you speak thus. We——”

“ Wrong you ? ” the beldame interrupted shrilly, mocking his tone. “ You would say that, brown knave ! Being shaped something like a man—the spoilt image of a miscreated maid—wrong is right, right wrong, in your eye. To hell with both of you ! May hell have you ! I want no Heaven ! I want—I long—to see my tormentors tortured ! To see the flames curling round their strong limbs, and fiends throwing fire into their sneering faces. Go your ways ! I’ll say no more to ye ! ” She turned abruptly, and happened to see the cross above the monastery.

Rage seized her : sent her into frenzies. She

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threw down her staff in a passion, and glowered with mad eyes at them, who stood troubled by.

“ You belong to that house of Satan! Would that I had evil words enough wherewith to curse you, and it, and all in that house of psalms and evil. My cruellest persecutors have been monks, priests, and the bullies and wastrels who for comfort or company pluck at the skirts of their cassocks. They have—just because I’m old and ugly—wasted my hearth, broken my home, lied about me, set boys to mock at me, women to teach their babies to fear me, men to cudgel and duck me in stinking ponds; and always given me pain, cold, hunger—pain and pain! ”

This outburst roused Ulf from his lethargy. He rose, an angry light in his eyes.

“ Fool-woman! cease your silly rancour. We are no persecutors, or ill-doers, but poor men with few friends. Why do you rail at us? ”

She stared at him: her glance grew duller, gentler. She bent to raise her staff, but Luke stooped and placed it in her hand. She took it, and then glanced quietly from Luke to Ulf, from Ulf to Luke—with broken mind, measuring their sincerity. They said nothing, but watched pitifully and waited. Evidently she was satisfied, for now she spoke with the voice of aged weakness, the energy of anger was gone. She stood there

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leaning on her staff, a decaying monument of human misery.

“ I am, truly, not in my full wits when I rail as I have been doing; but the hands and curses of men have been heavy on me. Years ago, while I could help, I loved and helped—my heart was a heart of love yearning to do good and make life kinder; but as I grew older, uglier, more lonely, men’s opinion of me changed. They persecuted me: and my power for love was turned to a power for hate. I cursed, was taught to curse. I met railing and hate with railing and hate, until now—I cannot help railing and I must hate. I pray you—who have spoken to me kindly—forgive an old woman who is hungering to die! ”

“ Peace be with you, mother,” said Ulf. He found in his pouch a silver coin, and pressed it upon her. She mumbled inarticulately as she hobbled away.

They watched her till the bend of the road hid her. Then bitterness re-entering Ulf’s heart, he said:

“ And of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.”

Luke made no comment. He was thinking of her malediction of the Church.

Jester and swineherd roused from their grief, interrupted in their problems by this incident, tramped through the wood towards Earl

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Rudolph's castle, Ulf's prison and home. But, though they conversed heartily, their voices were not expressing all their thoughts; for during that woodland walk—while the orange sun was casting blue shadows beneath the trees—each had persistently in mind—Lilith. But they only mentioned her name during their words of farewell.

Luke became oppressed with the idea of Death. The fruits of the slaughter of Nature seemed everywhere, during his march homeward. He had never before seen such prodigal evidence of the after-end of life. It seemed as if invisible guides were leading him through strange pathways, deliberately stimulating his morbid wonder, purposely arousing his saddened curiosity, for, with extraordinary frequency, he came upon white or yellow bones, skulls and bleached fragments of animals. Every hollow seemed a dumb creature's open sepulchre.

“ God, what does it mean? Where is love here? Anger and death everywhere! Where are mercy and love? ”

In his mind's eye he saw, somewhat after the manner of Ezekiel, the dead bones re-clothed with flesh, endowed again with breathing and identity. He saw the bodies of what were now yellow skeletons hurrying along lusty with life, proud in

“ Peruel ! Peruel ! ”

their wild beauty. Then, with lightning suddenness, the living creatures were stricken by Death's invisible hand, to lie with rotting flesh until Nature's scavengers had brought them to bones—bleached bones—again. Thus, in his mind's eye Luke saw creatures, for no evident reason, given life: and then, still without evident reason, given death. What was the reason, the root of this mystery? Why was it so? Was not that vision of life budding, blooming, decayed; existence epitomised?

If for an end in the world—similar to the trees, to blossom and bear fruit—they must be born and die, why did the Creator who was called Love permit pain and wanton cruelty to be parts of the transaction?

He was pacing along, deep in meditation. Day had slowly darkened. Night had come. White stars gleamed. A great moon crept from the horizon and hung, a vast silver lantern, in the south. The trunks and branches of trees were silhouetted against it. Night birds piped and called. There were mysterious sobs and creaking. The voices of the wood breathed about him. He was touched with the familiar awe of the forest at night.

Suddenly, a peal of uncanny laughter greeted him. He stopped, with ears intent and flesh

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creeping, to gauge the character and whereabouts of the noise. But silence—the twitter and stir which is silence in the forest—still lay undisturbed about him. He continued his way, having decided it was a loud bird-call, or shriek of some frightened animal, which, in the depth of his contemplation of mysterious things, his ears had misunderstood. Then—ting, tang, ting—the reassuring chimes of the monastery bell proclaimed compline. The music—wafted over a distance—touched his sensibility. In the loneliness and shadows of the forest it spoke of humanity and divine ideals. Under the spell of the moment he crossed himself and sunk to his knees, emotional, to pray. In real humility he asked for greater humility, and, with simplicity, prayed that vanity might not mislead him in his quest of the true.

Again, as if greeting his prayer, like a stroke of bitter pain, came the mocking laughter: now not a single peal, but in riotous, increasing volume—as though a sinister multitude were about him.

He looked up surprised, and stared: while fear and dread crept coldly through him. Then he saw.

Wherever he gazed, fiends were kneeling as he knelt, their hands clasped as were his. Every

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motion he made, his expressions also, were repeated, exaggerated, caricatured, by them.

In panic foolishness, he once more made the sign of the cross. Every one of the devils, simultaneously, dared to do likewise. Prayers unspoken sprang from his heart. His lips gave the words mute expression. The mouths of the fiends moved also, grotesquely mimicking.

Throughout that experience he could hear the gentle monastery bell and see the moon's beauty. To avoid the horrid vision, he looked for the stars; but the wings of evil, hovering, obscured the lights. He was surrounded with danger and kneeling in an avenue of dread.

He rose to his feet and started towards the monastery, guided by the call of the bell. He stepped cautiously, fearing to touch the horrid shapes. Tangible or intangible he abhorred them. He had gone but a little way, when shrilly, the peals of dreadful laughter came again from the mocking multitude. Then as one lurid, hateful cloud, the tormentors rose, extended wings, and flew into invisibility, leaving Luke with wonder oppressed.

Voices spoke to him out of the flying multitude, but his numbed senses could not accept their message. Afterwards, when they were gone, and there was nothing left to disturb the absolute

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majesty of the night, his brain automatically repeated some mystic words.

“Peruel! Peruel! Peruel! . . . Return!”

“What does it mean?” he asked himself. “Is life a dream? Who am I? What does it mean?”

CHAPTER X

JOHN AND JEROME

MAUSE, Luke's mother, met him at the door of their dwelling with the news that Brother Jerome had summoned him to the monastery. An ominous anxiety darkened the old woman's countenance as she gave the news; Luke's heart was troubled by the uncertainties confronting him. Never before had he been sent for in this manner. What could it mean? He, as did all the dependents, feared and disliked Jerome of the bitter tongue.

There was no alternative to immediate obedience. He went to the monastery and was admitted by the whispering janitor, whose usually friendly eyes looked at him with cold unfriendliness. Luke noticed this silent judgment, but was too proud in his humility to ask for reasons.

He passed, as usual, into the chapel to wait until Brother Jerome was ready to receive him. Before he could kneel or make any of the customary acts of faith and reverence he heard his name called in a raucous voice, and saw another monk,

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also in his way a notoriety, shuffling towards him. This was Brother John.

A large gross man was he, not clean, and without one obvious refinement. His girdled robe was greasy, worn, and torn. His sandals fitted loosely, and with their sliding and clatter caused his gait to seem more slovenly than it was. His eyes were small and dull; his nose an irreligious red. His teeth were yellow and bad, his chin ill-shaven, his nails gnawed to the quick. He was in all characteristics but ugliness—Luke was not beautiful—the complete reverse of the youth, whose life belonged to the pigs.

“You’re a fool,” the monk said, quickly and breathlessly; his lungs were not easy. “You’re bringing trouble on yourself. Why poke a hornet’s nest when the hornets sleep? Your fool-questions are doing the devil’s mischief in the—in the holy brotherhood. Be wise and stay mum: tell the Abbot you’re sorry. I’m speaking as your friend, young fool!”

Luke was distressed to hear that trouble threatened. John’s vague warning was worse than direct denunciation would be. The monk read his silence as obstinacy.

“I see you’re a fool. Pouf! It’s like mouthing music to deaf ears to talk sense to a fool. What will you do if the Abbot sends you packing?

John and Jerome

Starve. No one will help you. You'll have to share crusts with the outlaws, and live by robbery and bullying. You will! You wont? You will, young fool! Listen to me! What's to be got by being sent adrift? Nothing worth having. Stay here: hold your tongue. Look after the pigs. Say your prayers so that your neighbours can hear them, show you're loyal to Mother Church. Let the saints see you're not a fool—then you can eat, drink, sleep. What more do you want? ”

“ A very great deal, Father.”

“ Then you're a fool! You've been drinking. Have you? No, you don't look as if you boused.” He rubbed his ill-shaven cheek, pondering. “ You must be crazed in your wits. Only fools, or children, or crazy eld, ask questions which haven't any answer. You're too old, young fool. Get your wits into order; laugh, make merry. Look at me! I pray; but I laugh—make merry, too. Lent only lasts for six blessed weeks; if you keep asking questions and worrying your soul over the blessed mysteries, your whole life is Lenten. Pouf! Be a man, a jovial man. Marry a wench. Learn a few stories. Crack jests. Have children. They'll knock the sickness out of your wits. Young fool! ”

Luke listened with the semblance of respect,

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but his heart was hot with horror. The monk's personality expressed unctuous selfishness, gross indulgence. His words were nearly saintly in comparison with his presence and manner of speaking. Listening to him was like looking with drunken eyes through the dirty windows of a house of ill-repute. John, noting the youth's thoughtful silence, supposed his advice was to be fruitful.

He clapped him jovially on the shoulder. "You're not such a fool as you look!" he creaked. His voice had the music of rusted hinges. "Take the words of a monk who knows a man, and doesn't despise the bonny things of life." He sighed—such a blast of vinous breath! "What a day's work it was when God created Eve! Ah, the beautiful women! My boy, you are not meant for starvation and misery or"—another stupendous sigh—"the celibate life."

That was the beginning and end of the charitable effort of John. He went his way well-content. Luke could hear him blowing and shuffling along the monastery's main passage until an iron gate clanked behind him. Luke's heart had not been strengthened through that experience; indeed, his own uncertainty was stronger in consequence of the vast monk's breathless expostulation.

John and Jerome

He had not to endure for long that ordeal of foreboding. The brother who kept the door came, bidding him follow. Luke was conducted to Jerome's cell. As he entered the small and comfortless place of prayer, repose, and vigil, he was conscious that the most difficult hour of his life had come.

Jerome was sitting on the bare board which was his pallet. His long nervous fingers were playing among the pages of a gorgeous missal which he was reading or dreaming over. The moment the swineherd stood waiting within the curtained portal, the monk put the book beside him on the bed-board and cast a piercing look of enquiry and judgment at the face of the youth. Luke hid his shyness and gazed frankly into the keen eyes which searched his. Each was taking measure of the other's moral height and strength of personality.

"The pigs—do they prosper?" the monk asked.

"Father, they prosper well."

There was significant silence for a moment. Then the monk spoke again.

"It is a pity—is it not?—that so admirable a swineherd should turn theologian?—affect the heretic?"

A flash of antagonism appeared in Jerome's glance. His long lip curled—almost impercep-

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tibly yet not imperceptibly—in the sneer so well-known, so hurtful to those who had to endure it. Luke smarted with indignation at the contempt and the injustice, but he gave no sign of his feeling. He stood there silent; his head bent respectfully; eyes fixed on the mobile hands of the monk. The fingers all the while were playing with the beads of the rosary. Never for a moment were they still.

“Have you any explanation to give for this perversity?” the monk asked.

Luke was uncertain how to answer. It is so easy for the simple reply of an inferior to seem impertinent.

“Yes, Father, if you will hear me,” he said.

“A devil has entered into you, Luke,” broke in the other without heed of his answer. “You have set the monastery servants by the ears with your foolish questions. How it has come about I do not know, but it has come about. You must unmake this work of madness at once. As a humble suppliant penitent you must publicly unmake it. If not, you will rue your insolence, obstinacy, and presumption as long as you live.”

Coldly and slowly the monk spoke. The deliberate speech and the way in which he watched Luke while speaking added to the unpleasantness of the words. They staggered Luke.

John and Jerome

“ Father, if by asking my questions I have done mischief, I will do penance and suffer pain gladly; but I have never spoken of my troubles to any except monks of this monastery and one other, who has no concern with any of the lay-dependents here.”

“ I charge you to tell me who that one is.”

“ Ulf, the jester to Earl Rudolph.”

“ Ulf, Rudolph’s jester! So you, a servant of the monastery, babble your spiritual troubles in the ear of a fool—the licensed fool of that troublesome, unlicensed lord. A pretty fellow for a father confessor! ”

“ He is no mere fool! ”

“ Luke, I do not believe you. I cannot believe that you have not spread mischief among the folk here when you can make a father confessor of a motley fool. There can be no penitence in your case. You are contumacious—incorrigible. I go to tell the lord Abbot.”

“ Not yet, Father,” cried Luke, flinging aside the fear which cloaked his tongue. “ I have no wish to offend the Fathers of this monastery or any one. I have lived and hope to die loyal to the Church and to all in this monastery. Brother Hilary——”

There was a sudden motion from Jerome. His hand abruptly pushed back the missal beside him.

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He frowned. Was it from contempt of Luke, or enmity to Hilary?

"Brother Hilary?" he repeated, interrogatively.

"He will answer for my honesty. He knows the jester I have spoken of."

"Has he sympathised with your folly, and encouraged you to ask questions wherein heresy has been enclosed?" There was a sinister look—a snakish, sudden gleam—in Jerome's eyes, which however, Luke's answer banished.

"No, Father, Brother Hilary listened to me with courtesy and patience, and strongly discouraged my asking questions."

"Ha! You had better have done as my courteous and patient brother told you!"

Jerome rose and turning towards the wall where a wooden crucifix hung, genuflected and crossed himself while he muttered a prayer. Luke seeing the monk at his act of devotion knelt too, in churchman's sympathy, and said a five-words prayer. When he looked up Jerome was standing glaring down on him with anger-fiery eyes.

"You hypocrite!" he cried. "Hypocrite and, I suspect, heretic! How dare you defame this cell and these holy rites with mockery?"

"I did not mock, Father!" Luke rose, protesting.

John and Jerome

“Liar, as well as hypocrite and heretic! Now I rejoice that I and no other must do this thing, although it is a deed of bitterness. There can be no hesitation now.”

Luke was terrified by the monk's new manner.

“Father! Father!” he pleaded, falling again on his knees and raising arms in entreaty. “I am no mocker, no heretic, no hypocrite! but a lonely lad who for love of God and love of Love has yearned to know the truth about God and love! I have never said or thought one word which could cause mischief to any soul but my own. I have never spoken to any one of my troubles except to monks of this monastery—Hilary, Clement, Andrew, John; and Ulf the jester, who assuredly has spoken to no one of what I have said to him, for he is not the man to gossip about sorrows of souls, and talks seriously to none of the servitors. As I live I tell you the truth!”

There was earnestness, sincerity, passion in Luke's manner and words; but all was lost on Jerome. He was a man of jaundiced mind: white was yellow to his sight.

“Beware! Every word you tell which is not absolute truth is an added knot to the scourge wherewith hell-fiends will torture you.”

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" I do not lie! You are unjust in saying I lie," Luke answered angrily.

" Ha! "

" I do not lie! Neither have I spread mischief, nor hurt one soul other than my own—if that—by my questions. You speak as a persecutor! "

" You dare to say that to me—a man of God? " said the angry brother.

" Are you a man of God? " Luke asked straightly. He trembled with excitement, but full well knew how daring was the question. He was fighting with his back to the wall. A desperate battle had been forced upon him.

Three or four other monks hearing the voices, which through excitement had risen to an unwonted loudness, crept, curious and alarmed, from their cells to see.

Jerome was livid with anger; overborne with an unholy, sudden, passionate detestation of the youth before him. Never before had he failed to find from his well-ordered vocabulary the exact word he needed; but in his present agitation he stumbled in his speech.

Impulsively, he took the crucifix attached to the rosary swinging by his knee and put it close to Luke's eyes. His lips muttered incoherently, his eyes more eloquently spoke curses. Then with an effort he gained coherence of speech.

John and Jerome

“ In His name, I say unto thee come out! ”

“ Father, this is foolishness! ” cried Luke in an agony of horror.

The monks without the cell hearing what was happening, came further forward and stood, like frightened sheep, by the door: some crossed themselves; all stared stupidly, all were troubled and startled. Jerome, hearing their breathing and shuffling, turned and said:

“ Brethren, here is one possessed of devils,” and again lifting the crucifix, he addressed the supposed fiends: “ In His Name, I say unto thee come out! ”

Then could be heard the noise of many approaching sandals.

“ The Abbot! ” said one by the door.

A hush fell on the group by Jerome’s cell.

CHAPTER XI

ALTERNATIVES

THE Abbot of St. Dunstan's monastery was like a silver picture; a handsomer man was not to be found in Argovie. He was tall and stately. His thin, clever face, crowned with a ring of silver hair, had the pink bloom and freshness of youth. His eyes were blue as the summer sea; and, to carry the figure further, as the ocean alters its expression in compliance with the mood of wind and sky, so as his mood happened to be fierce or mild did the expression of the Abbot's eyes change. Generally kind and tender, they could, when his mind called for it, hold a hardness, hard as a rock, and cold, as the coldness of ice.

The Abbot was a power to love and honour, or dread; and Luke knew it. They were frozen, unbeautiful eyes that judged the swineherd when the Abbot came to the door of Jerome's cell.

"I want no brawling here," he said to Luke. "You will do as the reverend Father bids you, or—go! To-night, at home, get to your knees, pray

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till dawn, asking God to soften your stubborn heart, and put humility into your proud poor mind."

He passed along, the monks following singly, each with head bent and hands with fingers touching. Only Hilary, as he went by, gave Luke one little affectionate glance.

Jerome and the swineherd were alone again. Luke braced himself for a losing encounter.

"You heard what the Abbot said," the monk remarked, "to-night, and before mass to-morrow, you do as I bid, or pay the penalty—banishment from the monastery. Do you know what that means? It means absolute friendlessness, loneliness, foodlessness. Your only helpers can be the worthless and the cruel. And will they preserve you? Neither God whom you have denied, nor godly man will help you."

"Father, I have never denied God."

"The foul fiend himself could not be more contumacious than you. What are your questions but a continuous denial of God?"

"Never! I have faith and know God exists. I only ask why He allows some cruelties to happen, and unpunished injustice to continue to exist. I do not deny God. That is a mistake."

"That is, and you made it. What the Church teaches you doubt and question."

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“ I only ask for an explanation. I only ask for the truth.”

“ What is perpetual questioning but a perpetual denial of the claim of the Church to be the authoritative voice of God? What the Church teaches, you question.”

“ This is a misunderstanding. May I, in my turn, explain? ”

“ No. The time for that is past. Instead, you can prove your faith. I will try you a better way.”

Their argument had been direct, outright. Both in the straightforward colloquy had put aside any appearance or affectation of superiority and subordination. Each regarded the other as an antagonist. Luke knew his was one without mercy. Whatever was waiting for him was assuredly a thing of bitterness. That was the only certainty he could have before the moment of revealing.

Jerome went from the cell for a few minutes. Luke stood there waiting, his attention astrain, his heart seeming still through the tension. He heard the patter of the monk's footsteps going and coming through the corridor which led to the chapel.

When Jerome returned, he brought an oblong box, some fifteen inches long, made of dark wood inlaid with gold, the lid thickly encrusted with the

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commoner jewels. He placed it reverently on the table and then knelt in adoration before it, saying prayers silently.

When he arose he half-turned to Luke, who was astounded by the improved change in the monk's countenance. The sneer had gone, the suspicious watchfulness of the eyes had disappeared. A strange nobility shone in his expression, his face was alight with exultation and ecstasy. In his spiritual fervour the monk had put on new majesty.

"My son," he said, as with reverent fingers he gently touched the lid of the box. "In the hope of saving your soul from the eternal perdition which must be its doom if you persist in rejecting the authority of the Church, I have brought the holy relics enshrined here, and have prayed that through their sanctity and the sacred virtue contained in them, you may yet be redeemed and become humbly obedient. Kneel."

Luke advanced and knelt at a place which the monk with left hand indicated. There he would be just within reach of the shrine.

"Within this box," whispered the monk solemnly, "are part of the skull, hand, and three bones of the ever-blessed martyr after whom our Abbot takes his religious name. Their truth has been testified by tradition and special revelations

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made to holy men. Their efficacy has been proved oftentimes. Miracles have been wrought by the sight of them. It is asserted—I, for one, fully believe it—that a dead girl has been restored to life through their touch. But it is not of the relics that I wish to speak; but of you, Luke. Your soul—and the soul of every one connected with the monastery—is more precious to the Church than the body of any man. Not willingly would we let you go into the darkness. Every one of the brethren would give days and nights of fasting and prayer to save your soul from perdition. But its salvation in the circumstances rests only with you. You, who have grown up in the shadow of this holy house, are the questioner: you, who have never yet lived a day without hearing the hours chime from this monastery-bell have not faith in what we, the servitors and voices of the Church, teach; and through your questioning, your doubt, your infidelity, mischief has been wrought among the hinds. To stop their ignorant disloyalty, an example must be made—of you.”

He paused, Luke covered his eyes with his hands to gather his mazed senses.

“To-morrow morning before Mass, in the presence of all the monastery—monks and laity—you will come to the outer door of the chapel, before which ashes will be strewed. You will then

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on your knees, as a sign of the humblest abasement and lowliest penitence, mark in the ashes and kiss the sign of a cross. That done, you, following the procession of reverend Fathers, and preceding the lay helpers of this community, will enter the chapel and kneel beneath the steps of the chancel. There you will be robed in sackcloth and have dust and ashes poured upon your head. Then turning to the people—they need a lesson too, so your abasement must be public—you will loudly declare that you have sinned exceedingly in your wanton questioning, and will loudly promise henceforth to accept without doubt or question the truths and mysteries of the Church as she authoritatively teaches them.”

The monk looked down on the kneeling figure of Luke. There was, for the moment, sorrow and pity—unusual companions there—in his eyes.

“That humiliation, not a heavy one in the light of your offence, must be endured; or you are made excommunicate not only from this monastery, but from all churches and monastic houses in Argovie, so far as our summons may reach. Now, Luke, test your faith in the privacy of this cell; I call you, in this hour and place of sanctity, to come to obedience. Here,” turning to the shrine, he genuflected slowly—“here are the sacred relics of a holy saint. They are instinct with virtue. No

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one having true faith can touch them and pray for his soul's welfare without that welfare being wrought. Luke, urgently I counsel you, stretch out your hand, touch the shrine and say, ' By these holy relics, I believe what the Church through its priests teaches.' "

" Father, spare me! " cried Luke appealingly.

" My son, obey! In the presence of these relics to hesitate is to sin."

" Father, I am being pushed to a final decision when I only ask most humbly to be helped to understand."

" Had you willed to know, my son, you might have known all that the Church teaches. Has not my brother Hilary spoken; did not Clement speak with you? "

" Yes, Father; but they have not answered my humble questions. Do not push me too far now. Help me, Father: as they did not help me. When there was a difficulty they said: ' You must believe what the Church teaches.' "

" So you must, Luke, so you must! "

" Why? "

" Why? With these relics before you, do you dare to question? Oh, 'tis rank rebellion! heresy! "

" No, Father. I am no rebel or heretic. Is it heresy to ask? "

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“To ask unorthodox questions—questions which are intended to strike at the very foundations of the Church and true religion is, indeed, rank heresy.”

“But that, Father, I do not. I see pain, suffering, and death—innocence slaughtered: and in real humility, ask, ‘Why God allows this?’ Yet of answer, I get none.”

“You do get an answer, and a sufficient one. We say, have faith! God is a God of Love. We earth-men can only see earth-things with eyes of flesh, the unseen with eyes of faith.”

“But how are we to avoid having faith in false things also?”

“Because the Church is the guide, the divinely-appointed infallible guide. But I argue no more with you.” Jerome’s sublimer mood vanished in a flash of anger. His old self, narrow and bigoted, reappeared. He spoke dictatorially. “Put your hand on this shrine. Make the affirmation—the act of faith—take the vow which I demand; or you pay one of the penalties I have spoken of to-morrow.”

Luke sprang to his feet determined.

“Honestly and with sorrow, Father, I cannot. I cannot believe blindly. I want the truth.”

“Then you shall suffer,” the monk cried angrily. “You are defaming these holy relics——”

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“ Tell me this, Father, how do you know these dead bones are holy—have virtue? ” Luke’s eyes blazed. He was as fierce as the monk now. “ May you not be mistaken in them? Is monkish tradition, as well as the Church, infallibly true? ”

“ You blasphemous dog! Irreligious hound! Ungrateful you are, and shall be accursed! ” cried the monk, raising a trembling finger to the ceiling while he denounced the rebel. “ You will know friendlessness, cold, and want, and will starve! ”

“ I would rather starve! ” Luke declared.

“ You will die! ”

“ I would rather die! ”

“ And then—hell! ”

“ I would rather even that, than say I believe what I cannot understand. To do that is to lie! Oh, Father—” again, on remembering that excommunication meant banishment from the only home he had ever known, and the final loss of lifelong friends, his voice broke, he made the old appeal, “ Won’t you help me to understand? ”

“ No, you are lost! To-morrow you go; and the monastery will have riddance of its first and only heretic! ”

Jerome turned to the shrine, raised it, his hands still atremble with anger, and walked hurriedly out of the cell. Luke followed: and so out of the

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monastery—to the home which would be his a little longer.

Mause, the grey-haired mother, was waiting anxiously for him.

“What is it?” she asked. “Why did the Father want you?”

Simply, and with gentleness, he told her. The old woman was stricken with fear.

“They will turn us out of this dear home!” she said, looking round at the poor habitation where she had lived since Kelp had wedded her.

“They will not turn you out, mother!” Luke answered her, though, remembering Jerome’s anger, he was on the sudden not so sure of it himself.

“What else can they do?” she persisted. “They must have a new swineherd if you go—I cannot tend the pigs; and where else could he live? Oh, Luke, my better than son, love one who has been better than your mother to you.”

Luke’s determination was very weak at that moment. His throat seemed choked with unhappiness, his eyesight dimmed. Raising the old woman, he embraced her lovingly, kissing her forehead, cheek, lips.

“Love you, mother? You have been an angel to me. If you needed my life, mother, I would give it.”

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“Then for my sake,” she pleaded, “do as the monks wish.”

“That is a harder ordeal than death!” he answered gently. “It would be to lie, in a way that would shame my soul for ever.”

Mause withdrew from his arms and sat crouched on a stool, staring at the smouldering embers. Her world was tottering about her. Luke, seeing her misery, went to her, kneeled by her side.

“You shall not need a home, mother,” he promised, “even though the brethren should take this poor hovel for the new swineherd. I know good folk who will shield and shelter you. I will go to them now.”

“Who can they be? There is no one to shelter me! For more than forty years I have lived in this little home. It is full of dreams and memories. Kelp died here. My Luke, cannot you be faithful as he was? I shall not live much longer. Let me stay here till I am dead!”

Luke's heart and mind went through tumults of torture. The battle with Jerome was infinitely easier to endure than the simple appeals of her who had saved and been more than a mother to him.

For a time he could not trust himself to speak. Then he ventured to ask: “Would you have me publicly, at the altar-steps, pronounce a lie?”

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"No, dear, but it is not a lie. It is only to obey. The monks must know better than you."

"I asked them for help, and they have not helped."

"Think how good they have been—they have fed, housed, and clothed us all these years."

"And we have laboured for them, mother. It is not a question of kindness, but a question of truth."

"A question of life," Mause said despondently. "If you are grateful to me for the love I have given you, do as I wish, let me live here the few remaining years. This is the place I love beyond all others."

Luke was silent. He was facing his difficult alternative. He must either hurt the noble woman who had lived for and loved him, or on the morrow publicly proclaim a false repentance. Which alternative should it be?

He knew that the second was the impossible one.

He could no longer trust himself with speech, as he heard Mause quietly weeping. His heart melted, he sprang forward and knelt by her side: kissing, loving, adoring her, and she clung to him. Then he rose, rushed from the dwelling and ran, as fast as feet could speed him, to Yorg's cottage, where Lilith had died.

CHAPTER XII

EXPELLED

LUKE arrived, breathless, at the cottage and knocked lightly, but there was no answer. It was a household of sleep.

He turned from the door contentedly to wait till morning.

Before him stretched the dark lake. High above, over the south-western horizon, was the white crescent moon, directly under which, hanging by invisible threads, a seeming pendant, shone with more than lunar brightness the majestic planet of love. Stars lived in the velvet depths.

From his earliest days Luke had been strangely impressed by the lights of the evening sky. To no other mortal did their mystic splendours bring more mysterious or ennobling happiness. As he stood there with the sleeping cottage behind him, the leafy branches rustling above him, the large, vague lake stretched beneath him, laving with tiny ripples the reflected stars, he was filled with the awe, wonder, worship of existence.

He went to a hillock, cold and wet with dew,

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and sat there, lost in a wakeful trance. He forgot trouble. Gradually he was aware of being no longer alone. The spirit-world drew about him and he knew it. Souls spoke to his soul. His being was swathed in the comfort of spiritual content. Once more, though changed they were, more vivid and more true, the dreams of careless childhood came to him. Enrapt, he drifted into vision.

It seemed as he sat there, lost to time and all else of earth, that, one after another, in gradual rapid succession, veils were lifted from his eyes. The lights in the heavens seemed gradually nearer, larger, brighter, clearer. With their progress in majesty, harmonies grew, from a whisper—the sighing of the wind through leafy branches—to an anthem, such as angels might sing. Surely, as the veils were lifted from his vision and the stars of the sky increased in magnitude and splendour, they took shape—those fixed stars were as beings of light flying towards him with moving wings; the great planet shining beneath the moon was as an archangel—helmed and armoured in dazzling silver: and the crescent moon was a throne, whose occupant Luke could not see, for as, in his awe and joy and gratitude, he gazed upon it, his eyes—as if they were Godward-gazing—became dimmed.

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The holy majesty of his vision humbled him. He leaned forward, face in hands, praying. But all the while could hear the mystic anthem, which slowly developed into a mighty song, universal; and then, sweetly, slowly hushing, changed into this name, clearly and repeatedly chanted by celestial voices:

“ Peruel! Peruel! Peruel! ”

Luke's heart was chilled with wonder. He puzzled at the mystery.

“ Peruel! Peruel! ”

What was the import of that name to him?

Slowly the call faded away; and the music relapsed into the breathing of winds through the branches of leafy trees.

He looked at the sky again. The veils had fallen. The light of the moon and stars was phantasmal, vanishing. Dawn stretched its stately wings over the east. The lake donned its morning garb of grey. The day of excommunication was come.

He was roused from vision-land by the creaking of the cottage-door opening.

“ Heh, Luke! ” was the fisherman's greeting.

The swineherd's determination to assure shelter for Mause was not impaired by his night of dream and vigil. He overwhelmed the fisherman, and assailed the wife, with appeals and reasons, until they—poor souls!—with the unfailing, practical

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unselfishness of the poor, consented, if Mause were evicted, to succour her. So Luke found the one great obstacle to his moral freedom removed. It could not be necessary now to purchase liberty of mind by sacrificing her who had loved him most helpfully and well.

He returned to the ordeal at the monastery. He tended the swine for the last time, feeling very sad during the doing of that duty.

He had finished the necessary labour, and was lingering at the door of the sty, when Hilary approached, grave and grey.

"I suppose you cannot do as we wish?" he asked, his accents gentle and sad.

"No, Father!" Luke answered as quietly.

"I am sorry. I have loved you, Luke."

Luke hung his head with anguish of heart, not shame.

"You have been very good to me, Father," was all that, faltering, he could say.

Hilary put his hands on the lad's shoulders. "My son," he said, as he looked at him straightly, "what I expected has happened. I feared this catastrophe the moment the jester began his flip-pant questions. The pity—oh, the pity of it!—that you could not have lived and died in the ignorance that is happiness. Most men—every man, but one or two, the crazed or brave excep-

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tions—would have done so; but from the first you were different—one of the exceptions. You had thoughts and fancies which no other child whom I have met has known. There must have been many strange angels about you, despite the pigs, when you were born. That Ulf, that rascal Ulf, put his spark to ready tinder. I would gladly give him a world of pains for this: but what is, must be. I have loved you, lad Luke. Will you grant me one request—a request you can grant? ”

“ Gladly, Father.”

“ It is this. Come with me to the monastery, and bear what you must bear modestly and bravely. Whatever you are asked to do, do simply; or if you must refuse, refuse quietly. No good, and great evil, may be wrought by scandal and a riotous example. You will act so for my sake? ”

“ Yes, Father. I will act so.”

“ May the God who loves good men and sinners, despite their many sins, bless you, Luke. In all the sorrows and sufferings to come, be true man! I can speak of you, as I have fought for you yonder, as no other of the brethren can; for was it not I who, when you were an infant, tried to teach you? Ah, Luke, you brought to this earth a mind and wisdom which were not formed of the

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clay ideals of this earth. But it has been a wisdom ruinous for you. Farewell! You must not return to the monastery unless you come penitent—so, this is our last farewell. God help you, my son! May His angels watch over and guard you! Farewell! I may meet your soul in the hereafter. I shall not see your body again. Here is a little money, you will need it. Fare you well! ”

“ Good-bye, dear Father. I will try and be true man for your sake. I love the monastery, and—and you? Will you—if I cannot do so—let Mause know that there is a home for her in the house of Yorg, the fisherman? ”

“ That will not be necessary, Luke: her present home shall be preserved for her, I will ensure that.”

“ That is one more of your kindnesses, Father.”

“ Let us go now together, it is time,” said Hilary.

They went together in silence. Luke was approaching his great ordeal fasting, but his young body and an enthusiasm for the cause he was fighting rendered him impervious to the effects of hunger then. He was, moreover, strangely strengthened by the glorious and unreadable vision of the night. Yet, human weakness was not subdued—he shrunk from the burden before

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him. He knew he was no martyr, had certainly none of the martyr's exaltation!

When they arrived at the outer entrance to the chapel, the hinds and herders of the monastery were already gathered, a glum, unsympathetic group, beside the door. The only one then absent was Mause, and she came shortly afterwards.

Hilary entered the monastery, going to where the monks assembled for their procession. On the grey stone, beneath the carved chapel-door, was a pile of ashes. Luke's fellows, the subordinates, looked at the ashes as if they hid devils asleep. Luke having noted them in a passing glance, which gathered in all the details of that bitter moment, did not look again.

The lay-servants drew together—like a flock of foolish sheep—when the monks could be heard approaching; then in full unity of gaze they stared at Luke, curious to see how he would bear the ordeal.

Faithful to Hilary's request he remained unassertive; head bent, hand on girdle; a brown figure in the green loneliness, silent, and not rebellious. Pigeons flew down and strutted around him. Birds chirped loudly with shrill, inconsiderate voices. Doves sobbed as they perched on the chapel roof.

The monks, passing two and two along by the

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ivy-stained wall, grouped in a semicircle about the ashes. Not one glanced at Luke. All stood with bended heads and folded hands, until the Abbot—his mitre shining silvery in the sun—was on the step beside them.

“ Luke, swineherd! ” he called.

Luke approached the Abbot and knelt on one knee. He felt that every eye in that grey-green space was upon him.

“ Luke, swineherd! I believe—though I pray it is not so—I fear that even yet obstinacy governs you, that your eyes and ears are blind and deaf to the counsel and entreaties of my brothers. For the last time, I ask you: Are you penitent? Will you be obedient? ”

Luke, knowing that no monosyllable could have conveyed a true or an acceptable answer, was silent.

“ Speak, Luke! ”

The appeal of an aged woman rang pitifully out. It was Mause. She broke away from the hands which would have held her, and advanced with arms outstretched towards her foster-son.

Shadows of sorrow crossed his face. He rose and, turning, softly said to her: “ Have peace! Be at peace, dear mother! ”

The simple words touched her, and broke her heart.

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"Peace?" she asked. "Luke, Luke—" her voice quavered: she hid her face in her gnarled, worn hands—"was it for this I mothered you?"

Then Hilary did the kindly deed. He walked from his place among the monks and placing his hand quietly on Mause's shoulder, whispered while he led her away. His words seemed to comfort her; but before she was back among her fellows she turned sharply and said to Luke:

"I will never set eyes on you again." That was the manner of Mause's farewell to her babe. A sob of sorrow or contempt broke from the brown group of subordinates.

"If you refuse the offer we make you," went on the Abbot, "you are accursed! Neither God nor godly man will greet or help you. Your ways will be through loneliness and hunger to despair. Even now, at this twelfth hour, Luke, swineherd, I call to you to break your hardened heart, to have contrition of spirit, to come to these ashes and make the penance required."

"I cannot, Father!" Luke answered.

"You cannot?" the Abbot repeated. "You persist in denying the Church——"

"No, Father. Never that! Never that! I ask for the truth—that is all!"

"That is all! There can be no arguing now. I give you no more opportunities. Your last

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answer has brought you doom. You are dismissed from this monastery. Not bit, nor sup, can you have here, nor may you enter these gates again until you come humbly penitent, humbly obedient, prepared to do the full penance which you now refuse."

"Excommunicate him—curse him, Father!" was one woman's hysterical appeal. Her voice in that hour of heavy anger, sent a thrill—a stab—through Luke's heart. It was so like the voice of Mause. That moment was the nadir of his life's bitterness.

"Bell, book, candle!" loudly grumbled one of the hinds.

"He's mad!—mad as moonbeams!" cried another. The many agreed with that judgment.

The spoken unfriendliness of the words whipped Luke from sorrow to anger. But his promise to Hilary kept him silent. He cast a glance at the face of the pitying priest, and the retort which had trembled on his lips was unspoken.

Slowly the monks entered the chapel. None of them—not even Hilary—gave a parting look at the scapegoat. John was the last but one to pass through the doorway. He shuffled in, breathing heavily. The Abbot completed the procession of the tonsured. He paused to bend

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one stern hard look at Luke. In his eyes was malediction. Such was *his* farewell.

The lay servants followed immediately after, in customary quiet disorder. Every one of them, man and woman, from age to infancy, turned to look at their expelled companion. Mause was not among them. That ordeal of glances seared Luke's heart. He realized then how little love there is in humankind for humankind.

The janitor shut the chapel door.

The outcast was alone. The time of banishment had come. He stood there numbed. Presently he heard music and chanting in the chapel. That melted him. A prayer, more earnest than ever he had prayed before, rose from his heart. He pleaded for forgiveness. He pleaded for strength.

Meanwhile the birds chirped and chattered.

CHAPTER XIII

A FOOL AND HIS MONEY

As Luke entered upon exile, he could hear the voices in the chapel chanting an old familiar anthem, so, in the sheer joy of ended battle, he joined in the singing. He was barred from consecrated buildings, but could not by any man or all men be deprived of the fact of spiritual communion. The whole world, the universe, from grass to stars, was consecrated to God's glory, through the touch of the Hands of its Maker! That was a church for him to worship in. Man with all his skill in bricks and ephemeral prettiness, could only feebly and faintly imitate that!

Prayer, too! Could not he pray quite well and effectually in the forest solitudes? Is the love of God less to be found among flowers and trees than within an atmosphere of incense? As for singing, there is music sufficient and praise enough in the open world? From the skylark scaling the blue heavens, to the cricket chirping in the grasses, there are infinite sounds of laud and happiness, melodies and songs. The wind in the

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trees, the splash of moving waters, the rumble of the distant storm, are sounds as truly interpreting the moods of the heart of man as the trained voices of priests and choristers intoning.

Thus Luke, striding into freedom, in the beginning of his quest for truth, communed with himself. They may close the chapel doors, he thought; they cannot, shall not, shut me from God!

He was soon out of the demesnes of the monastery, breasting hopefully through the wood. He intended to go first to Earl Rudolph's castle to find Ulf, and there complete the hope of many dreams and days by again seeing Alys. He felt wonderfully happy at being liberated from the old restraints.

Never, certainly, had Nature seemed more full of gladness than during that morning of freedom. The sun shone brightly from a perfect sky. Trees and grass were gloriously green. Scented wild-flowers peeped here and swayed there in many-coloured radiance. A breeze blowing gently soothed his brow, quickened his nerves, braced his body and mind to proud effort. He felt truly a strong man. The unknown future was framed in shining hope. His aspirations were exalted. Come weal, come woe, he would do duty! And if he failed—but he would not fail.

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He was soon hungered, having fasted for many hours, having also spent a wakeful night and endured an exhausting experience. He felt in his pouch. There was no food; but his fingers touched the few poor coins Hilary had given him. For the first time in his life Luke was a moneyed man! He took out the four pieces and, smiling, tossed them in his palm. Here was the means to buy! The simple fact—the new experience—of possessing money, his own, changed still more the vista of things. He was going out of the old life into an entirely new one. He was impatient to learn more of what the new world was like.

He saw before him a green lane, a larger path in the wood, leading to—he knew not where. Quickened with the desire to explore, also indirectly turned away by shyness of Earl Rudolph's place and retainers; anxious, moreover, to see a little more of the wonderful world about whose mysteries he had so frequently made guesses and dreamed, he hastened to the bend beyond; that reached, new pathways, haunted with happy possibilities, lured him on.

Red squirrels scampered along branches, a hare foolishly exposed itself to stare at him, rabbits scurried across the road, birds fed here and flew there, singing, chattering everywhere. That way proved curiously fascinating.

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He would find the castle of Rudolph later. He must see more of Nature first. The moneyed explorer in Luke overcame the lover. At that early period in his journey Alys was unconsciously relegated to the golden future.

He went through the lane, passed turnings and bye-ways innumerable, seeing a thousand old sights which to his entranced and liberated senses seemed new, until the path descended a broken hill and he came to a dusty road.

Strange as it may seem, owing to his life having been so shut in, he had never hitherto seen such a road as this, which stretched north and southwards till its extremities were lost in green distance. Its surface was rutted and choked with faded garbage and white dust: it was really no noble thoroughfare—yet it lured him on.

Curiosity increased as every minute with its revelation of simple wonders went past. He must see more, more, still more.

So it went on, from hour to hour, through a long day.

He quenched his thirst at a spring; the water only served to stimulate his healthy hunger. He would find a house and purchase bread.

He found himself suddenly curiously shy. In the monastery, sight of or speech with strangers had not affected him. Now, in the unaccus-

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tomed new world, he was timid about unseen people.

He came to a poor cottage standing back under trees. Flowers climbed over the portal and hung in shadowy festoons about the wall.

A kind-faced woman was spinning by the doorway. Luke was won by her mien to appeal to her; but even then he hesitated to address her. She, seeing him travel-stained and weary, put into better speech the wish he faltered to make, and invited him to rest and eat. In the innocence of ignorance he offered a coin, but she smiled refusal; and brought a bowl of bubbling milk, with honey and wheaten bread.

Her sweet Samaritan manner—her alert, considerate kindness—captivated him. He went on his way invigorated and refreshed; yet feeling sad at parting from a friend whom it was a kind of religion to meet.

He walked for an hour thereafter, passing many country folk on the road, with most of whom he exchanged good-day. In that passage of salutation he had no shyness; yet was he timid about asking favours—unless he could buy them.

He had still his four coins.

Presently a beggar came stumping along, crutches under his arm-pits. A loathly, unkempt, filthy rascal he, exhibiting his sores, advertising

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his blatant beastliness—consequences of uncleanness—to filch kindness from the foolish-charitable. Luke, in his innocence, was afraid of the man. He wished, because of the beggar's unpleasantness of person, to pass him by; but the rascal, whining, told his oft-told tale. Luke fell a victim, and gave a coin. The recipient grunted ungratefully when he had it, spat on it for luck, pouched it surlily: then resumed his stumping pilgrimage. He knew the short way to an inn.

Luke felt he ought to be enjoying the happiness which is philanthropy's reward, but somehow the gratitude of the beggar had not seemed over-great; and Charity does like to hear the thank you.

Day closed, there was dampness in the air. Birds on many branches trilled and throbbed. The insect travellers of eventide came from their secret bournes to drift in the air around. The sky became clouded as the light faded. Darkness, throned in solemnities, grew.

Luke shivered. The air was chill: he was hungry again. He must find food and a sleeping-place; but inexperience made him shy and diffident about entering an inn. He determined to find a sheltered bed in the undergrowth or on the leese of a lonely barn, if in that unpopulous part of existence such were to be found.

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He strode swiftly along the road. There seemed, at this stage of the journey, no break in the walls of thicket and trees which flanked the thoroughfare.

Stars came breaking through the blueness one by one.

Their coming reminded him of the last night's vision, the glorious and inspiring details of which were still vivid in his mind. What was the name wherewith he was called? He puzzled and puzzled, but could not remember how the voices had named him. His mind was troubled by the all-but-remembrance.

The stars had always been to him lights of inspiration. Now again their constancy and exalting beauty helped him. He raised arms skywards and vowed to be steadfast to his ideals, just as they in their places were constant and true. They helped him with hopefulness.

The twilight monotony of trees was at last dispelled by clusters of houses beside a green with an old church at its centre.

Few of the habitations showed lights. Early though it was, most of the villagers were abed: but some were visible, sprawling, drowsing, or standing gossiping by doorways.

As Luke passed them he looked with quiet judgment at the good folk. They were solid,

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stolid, sober people; prosperous in the rural way, unburdened with imagination, true as wrought iron to the customs and notions their hard-working forbears had, through untold generations, handed down. They were harmless, or no more harmful than other uninspired, unsympathetic people. Luke was not impressed. He passed on, without addressing one of them. Their dulness and evident want of sympathy repelled him. He passed by all, but hunger pleading powerfully against his pride, he turned and approaching the nearest villager, a woman of numerous family, offered a coin, and asked for bread. She looked shrewdly at him—twinkles of cheap cunning were in her eyes—and took the coin. Then going into the house she returned with a mean, stale crust of coarse bread.

Luke thought he would have received more: but he was ignorant as a Noachian of the values of money, innocent as Ariel of the ways of the world. He took the crust with a word of thanks, and resumed his journey to find lodgment. Pride kept him from munching till he was out of the village.

He had hardly began work on the crust—appetite overlooking deficiencies—when he heard moaning by the roadside as from one in despair. He thrust the remnant of the bread hurriedly

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into his pouch, and stepped from his way to investigate.

Seated on the grass-bank was a ragged woman, evidently worn out with travel and want. She was not old, but the lines of trouble were heavy in her face; she looked sadly pinched and thin.

Luke forgot his own needs in sympathy. Touched by his eager words, she told him, incoherently, her tale. It was then—as it is now, as it will be till man reaches a higher stage in his evolution angelwards—the old and common story of hasty trusting and lasting loss. She had loved, been foolish, passionate; and was now a human derelict, deprived of her—everything. While she told her dismal and pitiful story she ate Luke's crust. He pressed upon her one of the two remaining coins. She thanked him with effusiveness..

"This," she ended, "will buy me food and a night's lodging in the neighbouring village. Without this I might have begged till I dropped!" Such was a proletarian's judgment!

Luke watched her as she walked away. He felt very happy. It was something to have done that little deed. But then revulsion followed. If she with that coin could purchase food and shelter, why had he been swindled?

The naked, ugly dishonesty of the seller of the

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bread appalled and discouraged him. Was that the charity and kindness of the world? He felt really unnerved, disheartened, by the incident. That he, who would have given himself to pain if doing so benefited another in need, should have been treated so!

Truly, mankind numbers many queer fishes.

He was hungry. He felt in his pouch to see if any crumbs remained. But no fragment of bread was there. Nor was the last of Hilary's gift of coins. That was gone—lost, no doubt, on the way. It was hopeless to attempt to recover it.

So ended Luke's first experience as a man of material wealth. He had been defrauded. The recollection rankled, but he clung to the memory of the earlier kindness.

He strode onwards bravely under the black night.

CHAPTER XIV

DREAMS AND IDEALS

THE night was cold, with a keen wind. Luke found a thicket sheltered in a hollow, and there lay shivering on a bed of leaves. He knew to the full what misery meant.

The life which he called dead, with its roughness and discomforts seemed in retrospect all smoothness in comparison with this. He crouched in the damp vegetation, and ached with too much weariness to sleep. His brain was working actively. He remembered to the minutest detail the life that was closed. His home had been poor, the old toil, humble; but they were his own. Now he had no home, was friendless: occupation was gone!

Mause, too; he saw her face, not as it had gloomed in the hour of his dismissal, but as it had always been before—warm with affection, sympathy, and maternal love. Dear mother Mause! As he lay there, in his misery, he remembered a thousand incidents which proved her love. And he had been compelled in the cause of truth and conscience to abandon her. Something must be very wrong with the social bases. He wondered

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who among the hinds would be swineherd in his place. In those weariful, wakeful hours he forgot nothing—not even the pigs.

Eventually he fell into a light sleep and dreamed of Alys. He was kneeling before her. She, glorious in golden robes, queened it on the old throne, which young imagination had raised from a bush in the homeland wood; she beamed on him with smiling eyes. Kisses lived in her looks. He awoke, shivering, in his thorny bed. O, phantasm happiness! O, real misery!

“What will you do if the Abbot sends you packing? Starve! No one will help you!”

If the monk John had been standing in the starlight before him then, the words could not have seemed more pitiless, pat, and clear. Luke started upright and stared at the darkness. He almost expected to see the gross monk haranguing him with stumpy forefinger upraised.

It was all fancy, or a voice in his brain—his brain which was working, working, while the body ached for rest. Brother John’s words as originally spoken—not an inflection or syllable seemed lost—raced through Luke’s mind, making him shudder.

He rose and stretched himself, then reclined again on the earth-bare couch and tried resolutely to resume sleep, hoping—fond fool—to revisit

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Alys in dreams; but, for a weary time, sleep refused its balm.

The arguments of the monks—their direct appeal for submission and indirect promise of plenty and peace—recurred to him; until, in the unguard of drowsiness his less noble self argued with and tried to cajole his conscience. Why should he not submit, live in quiet, be out of this and the coming discomfort? His senses urgently appealed to him to submit, his aching body pleaded with him, memory of the various monks' arguments appealed to him.

It was a subtle, strong temptation. His being and its needs, the overwhelming consciousness of loneliness, the vague, unpromising future, combined to plead with a force which under normal circumstances the tongue of eloquent man might not have found. Luke deliberately recalled to himself the old alternatives—he looked with a clear mind at the facts as they were, and as deliberately determined that the present trouble, penury, want, even though multiplied manifold, were better than acquiescence in what his scrupulous conscience held was intellectual servitude and moral slavery.

But it needed vigorous efforts of remembrance during that lonely night to keep him all true to his ideal. The gentle arguments of Hilary, the

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diplomatic appeals of Clement, the less generous frankness of Andrew, the cold superiority, seeming indifference and disdain of the Abbot, the blunt, brute logic of John, the sneers and subtlety of Jerome, each challenged his mind in turn. The thought-ridden youth had never before been so oppressed with orthodox arguments. Yet could none of it, nor all of it, beat down the simple strength of the questions he had asked. In all this logic and invective, there was no answer to his old difficulties.

At last the mind-conflict brought its own relief. Luke, out-wearied, slept, to awake at dawn cramped. For a little time he listened to noisy morning birds and then fell into a heavy trance-like slumber.

There ensued a dream—in which Alys bore no part. Nor Luke, as Luke.

There was a vastness, vague, magnificent, with much light. Out of the brightness came a voice, saying:—

“ Peruel, are you penitent? ”

Luke answered—though he knew it was not he who answered but one within him:

“ I am penitent! ”

There was, it seemed, an immediate growth of light. Then a second voice, from the heart of the brightness asked the same question—

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“ Peruel, are you penitent? ”

Again, the being hidden in Luke's self answered:

“ I am penitent! ”

A second time the brightness was increased.

A third time from the soul of the light came the question—now in a voice beyond all wonders of music and sweetness—

“ Peruel, Peruel, are you penitent? ”

Luke's soul answered: “ I am penitent ! ”

“ It is well! ” came a whisper—the breath of a far-off, tremendous utterance: “ It is well.”

There was deep silence; then, while the glory grew, and the brightness became vivid, dazzling, a fifth voice spoke, in a tone of pleading—though anger, also sorrow, were in the sound—“ Not yet! Not yet! ”

All the voices that had spoken—all but the whisper which was as the breath of a thunderous utterance, very far-off—sighed in chorus: “ Not yet! Not yet! Not yet! ”

The brightness went. The light faded. The dream was done. Luke slept for a long while in the prostration and abandon of absolute weariness. When he awoke it was bright daylight. Sunshine was reflected in the dew. Birds were singing rapturously. A blackbird on a bough but five yards from him was piping merrily. When he moved it flew away scolding.

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Luke felt unaccountably happy. He sprang to his feet, eager for life's struggle. Why were his heart so light and his hopes so high? Was it the living joy of Nature clamorous round him, which found sympathy in his breast? Perhaps! Or delight in the new liberty? He pondered, striving to find a cause. No, this it was he remembered—he had dreamed of Alys! His being glowed and trembled with love's glad consciousness. Poor fool!

The second dream was all forgotten. That was not for Luke the swineherd.

He began that day's pilgrimage with one assured uncertainty. He had not the faintest idea which direction to take for Earl Rudolph's castle. In the dark of the previous evening he had wandered in the wood after leaving the road, groping along tortuous ways, searching for good shelter; so when he found the road, on this morrow, it was at an unrecognised point and new angle. He knew not whether to go to the right or the left.

He solved the problem in Alexandrian manner. He went neither to right nor left, but, governed by the spirit of rash adventure, crossed the road and plunged straight into the forest before him. He cared not whither his feet were carrying him. He gave his shoes to the fairies.

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Hunger again forced itself into the comedy. Luke could not forget hunger; he was too young, strong, healthy for that; but remembrance of the olden brave ideals and innumerable thoughts occasioned by such memories, dimmed for a time the clamour of appetite.

The old ideals! How, in this green paradise of liberty he revelled in them! Truth, and the search for truth! He was shocked to find in the present freedom from restraint, how untruthful, narrow in many ways, the old monastic life seemed. But he brushed these thoughts away. Let the dead past bury its dead. Only weakness was wrought by such memories.

He must depend on himself now. He was an outcast, unhouseled, his own man and no one else's—not even God's, the monks would say. He would continue his quest for truth.

Luke came to a crystal pool, set in a circle of bright-leaved trees. He was so charmed by the peace and poetry of the spot that he lay for long beside the water, gazing into it, watching the blue reflection of the sky and the movements of the insects which sported ceaselessly above the surface. The contrast of the two reflected facts—the dome of sky typifying infinity, and those little sparks of existence, the least of the living creatures of a very brief day—brought to him problems.

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He lay there thinking and dreaming, heedless and forgetful of the hours; and slowly drifted along the path of mind-development which earlier he had deliberately willed to travel.

God and the greater existence! Man, insects, these few brief years! In this handful of words is the kernel of all man's philosophy. Luke had enjoyed little opportunity for book learning; but necessity and Nature were his adequate teachers now, and he learnt well. He read what the bookful blockhead misses—the bare insistent facts of life.

Morning lapsed to noon: the sun was descending the hill of day before he left the deep waters and returned to the workaday world.

The rest and thought were good to him. He had got beneath the excrescences, and near to the root of things when he continued his way; he was older and more confident than he had been the very few hours before.

He resumed the march—where to? The world was all before him where to choose—what should he choose?

Being youthful and healthy, with a bright mind and ideals of purity, the glory and call of Chivalry came to him. He raised brown arms towards the sun and noted with gratification their sinewy evidence of strength.

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Those were arms wherewith to fight wrong and help the weak. He picked up a fallen branch and wielded it as though it were the long sword of a shining knight. He saw monsters, giants, wrongers of loveliness and the weak; and felled them, grovelling. He became one of Quixote's company.

Dreams, dreams! He revelled in the visions of youth, which, fortunately, die unnoticed at the moment of their glowing generation. Dreams, but not useless dreams—for they feed and inspire the mind, and ennoble earthly intent, enabling some true work to be done, when the opportunity calls for it.

Luke decided to be a knight, though not yet. There was a wilderness of mean labour to be gone through before he could win golden spurs—but what of that? No true knight was ruined through early ordeals. He would serve and be strengthened through humanity; and would be the better knight because of the necessary waiting, watching, marching, in the wilderness.

He would be true knight. His ladylove should be Alys. Brave deeds should be done to her honour. His watchword, Truth.

Meanwhile he plodded through the forest, feeling hungry.

He was hatless. The sun shone on long brown

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locks of thick hair. Face, arms, and legs were tanned with exposure. A brown garment of skin and sacking, bound at the waist by a leathern girdle, hung in comfortable negligence from his shoulders. His feet were shod in buskins of untanned leather. An empty pouch hung at his belt; that was all his possessions.

He was not handsome. His features were bold and irregular; but his eyes were brave, and the spirit which shone in them was an endowment and possession better than beauty. They were the eyes of a knight with glowing ideals.

Should he be minstrel too? He had heard troubadours at the monastery, repaying the monks' hospitality with tributes of song; and though he had never before thought of mere melody-making, he was inclined now to try his powers.

He imagined himself arrayed in silks and colours, twanging a lute, singing to a company of the gallant and beautiful. He raised his voice—it was not music which came. What was endurable in a psalm-chorus would not therefore please the ladies. The would-be minstrel died an immediate death.

Luke traversed miles of wild woodland during that afternoon and early evening. His feet seemed never tired. He grew amazed at the

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vastness of the forest. Would he never see a house, or reach the other side of the fastness of turf and trees?

At last he came to what, in the general pathlessness of the wood, seemed something of the semblance of a path. He turned down it. He was anxious to end his journey through those wilds of Weissnichtwo.

He walked along the pathway for some mile or two, when he heard a voice. He stood still, ears and eyes intent. Then he saw, peering out of the thicket, a bearded face, grinning.

Luke hoped it was a friendly face; but he felt queerly.

"Good evening, friend," he said.

"Good evening, friend," was answered at his elbow. He found his elbows seized, imprisoned, in an iron grasp: the face in the thicket continued grinning.

CHAPTER XV

LORDS IN THE FOREST

BEFORE Luke quite realised the position, deft fingers had felt in his pouch.

“Poor devil!” quoth the man who had seized him. “Not the shadow of a drink there!” and loosed Luke to stare at him.

The rascal who grinned from the thicket came from his fastness to stare too.

“You are a spy!” he hissed suspiciously. “Who else would be coming our ways penniless?”

“Are you?” said the other roughly.

“No, only a friendless man. I happened to be going your way because there was a path——”

“And a trap to catch boobies in!” interrupted the man of grins, enjoying his own humour, and thereby losing his suspicion.

The break of laughter served to relieve the tension which had kept Luke passive. It woke his sense of independence. He quickly studied his captors, measured their condition and character.

They wore the livery of the forest. Both rascals were gaunt, sunburnt, ragged, unkempt.

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Hair and beards made long appeals for scissors. Each had a knife at his girdle and held a spear in his brown hand. One had, also, a bow with arrows slung across his shoulder. There was the glint of the cunning of wildness in their eyes. They were human foxes or wolves, made sly and fierce by the utter abandon of their lives. They were lawless, and beyond the laws; except for the primitive agreement which bound them to their company; but to that primitive law, on which their whole well-being was based, they were completely faithful.

"This forest is no man's and every man's," Luke asserted. "You have no right to prevent my going whithersoever I please."

"Is it so, young cockerel?" cried the chief of the two, ruffling. "Talk like that and I'll make you cockadoodle to another tune. We are lords in this forest!"

Here the merrier rascal interposed with better effect.

"You are a friendless man," he said to Luke. "So are we. All hands are against us, but we are loyal brothers, with our hands combined against all else. Come with us; join our company. We want lads of heart and muscle and equality. Can ye fight?" he asked.

"I have never fought," said Luke simply.

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“Never — fought! Then we’ll teach you! Clench a fist!”

Luke did so.

“Hit me here!” said the outlaw, beating his bony chest. “A good buffet straight from the shoulder. Hit like a man, as hard and straight as you can!”

Luke obeyed with a stout and level blow. The other received it without yielding a grass-breadth.

“Pouf!” was the contemptuous comment. “God meant you for a dairymaid. That’s a fist for patting butter. But we’ll make a man of you yet. Come, Dirk,” he continued to his glum comrade, “shall we take the cub to the company?”

The three walked in single file down the avenue, Luke between. He had nothing to fear from that pair; there was, besides, the hope of food and guidance. How often is the hero heartened by the promise of pudding!

Twice were the three challenged. Each time the challenge was made and met, Luke became the target of wild and curious eyes. He found the outlaws more numerous than he anticipated. Now he had an opportunity of discovering what lawlessness meant. This was the life which the monks—or his own insistence—had condemned him to! Well, no doubt there was a seamy—there was certainly a threadbare—side to the

Lords in the Forest

magic robe of liberty; but the prospect of the open life in that early hour of freedom was not disagreeable.

They came to a hidden clearing, made with fire and axes, in the thickest part of the forest. Three tents—discoloured screens of coarse texture—were the only kinds of shelter other than the trees. Large cauldrons steamed on fires which flamed and smouldered. A column of thin blue smoke drifted upwards into the overhanging branches. Some dozen or fifteen men squatted or stretched drowsily upon the turf. It was the hour of self-indulgence and siesta. There was silence and sluggish peace in the encampment, which even Luke's arrival did not dispel.

Obedient to a gesture he rested by the fire, and in a little while was eating heartily of bread and broken meats; the drink was a rough cider made by the gypsies themselves.

It was some time after darkness before there was any bustle of life: then life bustled indeed. There came faintly on the breeze a challenge which drew a commanding answer. At once the lazy ones lying about the encampment sprang to their feet, buckled on swords and knives, fastened their ungirthed belts and were prepared for the return of the chief; while three women—of poverty and pity—came from the tents and began to stir and

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test the contents of the cauldrons, throwing faggots on the fires, making them blaze.

A few minutes afterwards the chief arrived—a black-bearded, fierce-eyed giant; his broad and powerful body clad in a faded plum-coloured jerkin. He carried a cross-bow in his hand; sword and dagger dangled at his waist. Across his shoulder a leathern bag, half-filled, was slung. No sooner did he enter the clearing than his eyes stared in stern enquiry at Luke.

“Who is this?” he asked; his voice had the boom of a horn.

The three women turned from the cauldrons to look at Luke: one of them gazed at him with more than normal eagerness. She was a thin, gaunt woman of few years, who might have had some charms had she lived another kind of life. She was a girl decayed in youth.

There was a general buzz of interest with ribald jokes; while Luke, whose face was the only beardless one among them, flushed, rousing more ribaldry and laughter.

Dirk was his apologist now.

“He is quite harmless. A penniless, starved pup, whom we found wandering aimlessly in the forest.”

“Tell me your story, stranger, while the supper is made ready,” the chief commanded.

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Luke thought it best to do so, though only a bare outline was given. He said nothing of the reasons for leaving the monastery; but made it clear that he had been expelled, and that now he wished to find Rudolph's castle, and enter the Earl's service.

All the outlaws, except the few who helped the women with the getting ready of the food, squatted or stretched in a circle about Luke, while standing he told his tale. The fact that he had been expelled from anywhere gave him instant entry to their free democracy. A victim, and therefore supposed enemy, of the monks had an especially potent claim on their comradeship. No further passport to their favour could be needed. They hated the Church with a wild, unreasonable wrath.

When Luke had ended his story, the women gave the word that the food was prepared. So all, except the prisoner-guest, ate greedily, and drank thirstily. The women acted as servants; neither sitting, eating, nor resting, until the men, their masters, were done. The fragments were thrown to some ill-conditioned dogs, the pets and scavengers of the encampment, and the women retired to their quarters in the tents.

For a time the men sprawled in the firelight, dicing, drinking, talking loudly and with boastings

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of the day's adventures, grumbling with a strange variety of oaths at their misfortunes. It had been a day of mean profit. Still they were jovial in their discontent. The chief called suddenly to Luke:

“ Will you join our company, stranger? ”

Luke did not at once answer. He had come to dislike the riotous speeches, the filthy humour, the coarse jesting, the licence. Dirk, his first friend, now misreading his silence for the unwillingness born of cowardice, interposed contemptuously.

“ He's no man for us! He hasn't the guts of a man. We've got three too many women as it is! ”

“ Who says so? ” asked the leader, glaring savagely at his subordinate. “ Your tongue is surly, Dirk.”

Dirk, between whom and his chief a feud and old jealousy existed, laughed contemptuously, grasping the hilt of his knife and defiantly returned the look.

“ Let him prove his stomach and strength by wrestling with one of us,” suggested a looker-on. “ Why waste words? ”

“ Ay! ” was the general chorus. “ A wrestling match! ”

“ Can you wrestle? ” the leader asked Luke.

“ I will try.”

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“Bravo; that’s a man’s answer at any rate. Form a ring!”

The outlaws, who were seated, shuffled back, clearing a wide space. More wood was thrown on the fires to add to the light.

“Who shall be our champion?”

“Dirk!” said the chief, with a sneering laugh.

“Do you mean that for an insult?” Dirk roared.

“Don’t be a fool!” said the chief shortly. “If you don’t want to wrestle, say so.”

“To ask me, the second of the company in strength and authority—if indeed I am only the second—to wrestle with this boy is an insult which, if repeated, will be answered this way!” He drew his knife, felt the blade, and then, after a deliberate look at the leader, resheathed it.

Luke had become alarmed by the quarrelling. The first idea of a free woodland life had appealed to him. The spirit of illusion had taken advantage of his ignorance. He had read outlawry as meaning personal liberty and freedom from blind formulas, with life in the open under God’s sky. That would be the ideal life: but this wrath, licence, unseemliness, was horrible! Alarmed at the threat of savage bloodshed he interposed.

“I would not wrestle with Dirk,” he said to the chief decisively. “He is ten times as strong as I.”

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“Is that modesty or cowardice?” sneered the leader. “Choose your own opponent, then.”

Luke looked around. “There is no one here with whom I should care to wrestle,” he admitted.

“Ah! cowardice!” was the comment.

“No,” cried Luke. “I am not a coward, but it would be folly to think myself stronger than I am. I have no such braggart’s comfort; but I am willing to meet any one you choose in a friendly bout. You have fed me, treated me hospitably. I owe something for that, and will repay it by doing my best in a friendly wrestle.”

No man moved. There was laughter and small talk amongst them. Contempt was still audible in their voices.

Then one of the women—more anxious for Luke’s safety than she ought to have been—happened to peep from the tent.

“Ha, there’s our champion!” cried the chief, seeing her. “There’s a rival fit for you, stranger. Kathie!” he called.

A roar of delight and derision arose from the crowd. Even Dirk’s surliness dissolved in the general laughter.

“Kathie! Kathie!” cried they all.

Luke turned to see whom they were addressing. There to his dismay was the tall, gaunt, young woman who had gazed so wistfully at him in the

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beginning. She stood there breathing heavily, as red as roses: a picture of speechless misery.

“What cowards you are!” cried Luke. “Is this bravery?”

“Come here, Kathie!” cried the chief, a sinister note in his deep voice.

She hesitated, then obediently moved towards him.

“You wrestle with this man!”

“She does not!” said Luke, with decision.

“I do not!” she said. “I—I would not hurt a hair of his head!”

The rascals roared with delight. This sort of answer touched their humour like magic. The girl hid her face and stood trembling.

“Cowards!” Luke cried. “To insult a woman!”

“See here, boy!” the chief said, darkly. There was a tumult of angry voices. “Dub any of us by that name again, and by God I’ll kill you.”

Luke’s indignation was not subdued by that or any threat. “Where is there man’s work in treating a woman so?” he asked.

“Hold your silly tongue,” said Dirk. “Go back to your tent, Kathie. Let Connol wrestle with the bantam. Give him a lesson, Connol; break a rib!”

The chief muttered a word confirming the choice, and all squatted attentively in a ring;

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while Connol, the tallest of the outlaws, rose and threw off his torn outer garment of sheepskin. Luke removed his pouch and tightened his waist-belt. Both combatants kicked off their shoes; then approached each other, watching closely.

It was Luke's first wrestling bout, though he had often witnessed such encounters among the hinds of the monastery.

After feinting twice, Connol rushed in and got the grip. At once it was evident that the contestants were no match. The outlaw was the superior in strength, height, and experience. They fell.

"Break him!" cried Dirk, at which words Kathie, in the background, screamed.

Luke was, however, not to be broken. He had a pliant body and supple limbs, as well as the elastic energy of youth. Dirk's words gave him determination. He clenched his teeth and vowed in his brain never to give in. He clung close to his opponent: so close that Connol, who tried by every art to master him, could not do so. Now on feet, now lying lengthwise, both struggled gamely, swaying and straining. Time after time Luke was swung off the earth, time after time the two were grovelling, he generally undermost, but always he just evaded defeat. Every clinch and throw known to Connol was tried in vain.

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He could not get the other's obstinate shoulders flat on the ground. He lost his temper. Luke kept his; his wits as well. Minutes passed. Luke's plucky fight roused frank admiration among the outlaws. Dirk's prayer to Connol to break him brought answering cheers for Luke. Partisans sprang to their feet, and shouted encouragement and counsel. At length the chief walked into the ring, and laid hands on each.

"Stop the bout," he cried. "Well done, young stranger!"

The wrestlers loosed their grips and stood apart panting. Connol eyed Luke angrily. Loud and careless comments made by his companions were wormwood to him. Tortured by their mispraise, he came forward, challenging renewed combat; but just then there was a distant hail, followed by the sound of hastening feet.

A wild-looking, weary man ran into the encampment.

"Gawfrey, you bring news?"

"Yes, chief," answered the outlaw newly arrived.

"Good news?"

"I hope so. The Abbot of St. Anthony's starts secretly to-night—fourteen men-at-arms to guard him, and five shavelings to guard it—with a chest of gold—Peter's pence from all around!"

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“ Good news! Which way and whither do they go? ”

“ Whither is not certain; but I had it from Tom Paunch, in his cups, that they go in secret to-night, and will be passing over the white river-bridge within an hour of midnight! ”

“ Grand news! ” cried the chief. “ We will count gold before morning, and then adieu to hunger and these parts for a month or two! ” There was much unsuppressed excitement. “ There can be no more wresting now! Stay till to-morrow, stranger,” he commanded Luke.

“ One fall to decide! ” Connol pleaded.

“ No more wrestling! ” said the leader, with emphasis.

“ I will throw him! ” Connol declared, and sprang at Luke: but before he could get a grip of his throat, as he tried to do, the chief had also sprung and seized and wrung the subordinate's arm. There was iron and fire in that action. Connol involuntarily cried with pain, and fell to the ground dazed, his jerked arm very nearly broken. He lay there for a little while, his eyes flashing, his face pale, glaring at Luke, and cursing him.

The chief went on unconcernedly giving instructions.

“ Dirk, take three men. Scout through the

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wood southwards, and get in touch with the shave-heads, without letting them once see you or suspect your whereabouts. Report to me as soon as possible. I with seventeen men—more than enough—will be waiting them in the thicket before the bridge—unless your report counsels another plan. Connol, you come with me. The rest will guard camp, and have food ready for our return. “Boys,” he cried cheerily, “this is great news. The Abbot of Anthony’s is a psalm-spitting rascal I have long wished to meet; but his store of Peter’s pence will make amends for many imperfections. When we have got it we go from these parts. Gawfrey, come with me to my tent, you shall drink well for the tidings your feet have carried.”

There was immediate bustle of preparation. Swords, knives, spears, crossbows, and the weapons of archery were again and again proved and tested. Dirk and his scouts disappeared like shadows into the forest shades. Of all that wild company, Connol alone was silent, surly, and morose. His fingers played with the haft of his knife. He watched Luke without intermission. If ever the baleful fiend of revenge looked through a man’s eyes, it peeped through Connol’s black orbs then; but Luke was heedless, indifferent to his danger. He was glad to rest by the fire after his weary

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march and subsequent desperate struggle. He was interested in the scene of activity about him; but his thoughts returned to their olden problem. In the outlaws' den he wondered about truth.

The darkness and the silence deepened as the many minutes passed by and it was time to start. The chief gave the word. There was at once renewed excitement, wild and ready obedience. The women emerged from their obscurity, bringing a last stoup of liquor for the men. While the outlaws were drinking, the chief again addressed Luke:

“Stranger, if you are willing to join us, we shall welcome you. I shall know your decision in the morning.”

Then, quiet as ghosts in the woodland, the adventurers went their way, Connol glaring a last look of murderous promise at Luke. The women and about a dozen of the older men were left in charge of the encampment.

CHAPTER XVI

FRIENDS OF THE FRIENDLESS

THE outlaws who remained tended the fires, wrapped themselves in cloaks and blankets, and—with the exception of one who sat sentinel at the entrance to the encampment—went to sleep. Luke lay by the fire, watching the flickering flames and glowing embers while he thought of that outlaw-life.

To-morrow he had to choose whether to join the wild brotherhood or go back to the world of conventional men.

He would say No to the proposal. That was his ultimate decision. He closed his eyes and slept.

He woke suddenly. It was still the deep dark of night. The warmth of the fires was subdued. He sat up wondering whether the outlaws had returned; and then discovered the cause of his awakening. Kathie was there. Her pale face shone vaguely in the flickering light. He saw her put finger to lips counselling silence, and then creep backwards into greater darkness. Luke, obedient to her actions, rose and quietly followed her.

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When they were out of the sphere of firelight, and well away from the outlaws sleeping, she touched his arm and whispered:

“ You must escape this night, even now.”

“ Your chief ordered me to stay until to-morrow,” Luke reminded her.

“ Still, you must go! If you fail to do so, Connol will kill you! ”

“ Kill me? ”

“ Connol will. He has the blood-thirst. I know Connol, as I know them all! ” she added bitterly, “ and not one would hesitate to knife you for the smallest cause. You must go. Since you wrestled with him, Connol’s eyes have looked murder. He hates you to the death, because all saw he could not throw you. Nothing can save you if you do not go! ”

“ But you! ”

“ I? ”

“ What will become of you? ”

Luke could not see the girl’s face; but he felt his hand seized, raised, kissed passionately with hot lips. Then she dropped the hand, and said sorrowfully:

“ This is my life. I could not go away. All my kindred are here. I am too useful to be killed,” she added bitterly.

From his soul Luke pitied her.

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"You will remember me?" she went on wistfully.

"Always, Kathie. I will never forget you, or how you saved me!"

"There is the comfort that will stay with me. I knew you must go; at first I hated to tell you so, because—because I liked you, and wished to keep you; but that would be cruelty to you, and Connol would kill you, so I woke you. Here, wrapped in leaves, is food that will keep you for a day. There are springs in the forest to drink from. Good-bye. What is your name? Tell it to me—to remember!"

"Luke is my name, Kathie."

"Luke," she repeated softly. "Call me again by my name, Luke."

"Kathie, my sister Kathie," he murmured.

"Good-bye, Luke," she said. Her voice faltered—she caressed his hands.

He clasped her in his arms, and kissed responsive lips.

"Good-bye, good-bye, Kathie. I shall remember how you helped me this night!"

"Where would you go?" she asked.

"To the Earl Rudolph of Redland's castle. Do you know it? I have a friend there. It is near the Monastery of St. Dunstan."

"I do not know either place," she admitted.

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“ We keep well away from castles and monasteries, and are seldom in these parts of the forest. They must be to the north—yonder, where those seven stars are shining. I will guide you a little way, as it is dark. Take my hand. Quietly! There are no Connols that way! ”

“ You stay here, Kathie, where you are safe. I will find the way.”

“ I am safe everywhere; but you, who know not the forest and its lurking dangers, will be quicker out of it, if I am your guide. Come! ”

Hand in hand they crept between the thickets, speaking never a word.

At last they reached the roadway. The first greyness of dawn was softening in the east.

“ Follow the star,” she said. “ Good-bye, good-bye! ” They kissed again and parted. Then she plunged into the woodland, and he saw her no more.

Luke walked well, and by sunrise had covered miles. Shortly thereafter he came to the flower-loved cottage, where on his outward journey the woman of good heart had given him food; he was on the right way!

His living gratitude prompted him to make some return. He ran into the forest, found and plucked sweet flowers, and left them a fragrant

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tribute within her gate. Then he went on his way. The journey was easy now; before evening fell he would be with Ulf!

He left the road to walk on the grass in the shade of the trees, and, as he walked, remembered the life of outlawry, shuddering at the wild misery of their lot. The women, too! Poor Kathie! He thought of the penalty of wrath and hatred which the outlaws must suffer. Their lot was that of utter loneliness and friendlessness. Their union was knit through hatred against all others.

“Poor brothers of mine!” to himself he murmured. “Poor brothers of mine!”

He was still far—almost as far as ever—from the accomplishment of his quest. He had hoped to find something of the truth about life and mankind in the wildness, and had found little more than the angry rudeness of the outlawed. The truth he sought was certainly not with them. Could it be where lawlessness, fierceness, blasphemy, brutality reigned?

So thinking, he marched from a fastness of woodland riot to a fastness of organised strength, and was buoyed with confidence that there, at all events, he would find objects to love. There would be Alys perhaps, and Ulf certainly. His hopes grew confident, his spirits were high. Sing-

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ing as he marched, he covered speedily the grassy miles.

Leaving the monastery lands well to the left, he plunged through the belt of forest, the outer limit of Earl Rudolph's domain, wherein he had never set foot before.

The freshness of the grass, with the sub-arboreal coolness, soothed him. Though he had accomplished a long journey, his powers seemed hardly less vigorous than ever, his hopes were so high. He answered the evening calls and piping of the birds with song and happy whistling. He practised the old calls as he had learnt them in days long-done; and then—heard one of his calls repeated!

Was that man or bird? he asked himself. Was that answering echo a message of sympathy or mere mocking?

The voice of the echo answered the unasked question: out of the distance, softly, gaily, came the lilt of a well-known song.

“Ulf, Ulf!” he shouted, and ran. Ulf it was, small birds fluttering and feeding about him.

Not three full days had passed since last they met; yet how much had happened during that little time! Earl's man and free man stood gazing at each other, not speaking for a while.

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Then Luke told his tale fully, beginning with the evening of Jerome's attempt to exorcise the devils, to the present victorious hour of reunion. Ulf, watching his friend's face, listened with growing wonder, which exploded in wrath.

"The tyrants!" he muttered, shaking a fist in the direction of St. Dunstan's. "I am glad you have left that shrine of bitterness and hypocrisy. 'Tis a pig's nest. We will sing a joyful Te Deum because the fools have dismissed you! They have thereby foolishly done one good deed!"

"I am glad to be here, Ulf, though Mause and Hilary are there; but I have no hatred against any of the monks."

"You were meant for a holy martyr!" was Ulf's sarcastic comment. "I hate them all—I am bound to confess it—I hate them all, from Abbot to exorcist. Their prayers and poses could not save Lilith; and now you, who held the humblest of their offices faithfully, from childhood to manhood, are sent packing like a lost sinner, just because you asked for the plain meaning of their antics. It is all one lie!"

The jester spoke with angry bitterness. Luke had never before seen him so vehement.

"I cannot think that, Ulf."

"You will learn, my son, you will learn! There is no comfort for the intelligent mind in

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blind faith. We have, the wisest of us has, less knowledge of the invisible than the playing child. If you want some truth about the mysteries, hearken to infants at their games. They know as much as—Jerome!”

For a time they sat with silence. Then Ulf sprang up.

“It is growing dark, I must be tickling the fools with my folly. Have cheer, O Lucas! There are smiles in the world yet. I’ll be your father-confessor henceforth for evermore!”

“Will you help me, Ulf, to find occupation in the Earl’s household? I will work faithfully.”

“I know that, my lad of loyalty! I will do my best for you. Be prepared, though, for a harsh ordeal. The motley-man—alas!—has little more influence among the sparks in office than a joking jackdaw.”

“I would rather fight my own battle, Ulf.”

“And will have to—woe or well be the word—from the very beginning.”

“I have hands, wit, and gratitude. I will be worthy of you, Ulf!”

“You are more than that already, Luke; be worthy of yourself, and of your dreams.”

Ulf led the way rapidly towards the castle. Luke followed eagerly. Hope’s dreams about the future were busy in his brain. He had all the

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rich optimism of youth. That world of trees was transformed to him. The plain things around him were magically different. He roamed through a brave wilderness thronged with visions of knightliness and beauty. He saw himself in shining armour, astride a large white horse, holding a banneret of cloth of gold, on which a red device was worked. A long sword hung at his side. His head was bare, for with gauntleted left hand he balanced a plumed helmet on the pommel of his saddle. The knight with the proud, glad eyes—himself—rode towards a lady, beauteous; all graces were shrined in that one being—It was Alys! the ideal!

Ulf's voice waked him from reverie.

"You will have to do the filthiest work in the stables, for a time. It is the ordeal insisted on by the Earl, to prove fitness for fighting. You will be servant to all the brutes, for a while. You will cleanse stables, polish dishes, wash dogs, scour armour, run wherever and whenever a petty tyrant shall order it. You will have to endure every form of drudgery, insult, shame—do the thousand mean duties which to all of us are hateful. Can you bear it, I wonder? I will help you, guard and love you; but how little can any underling do. Bear it you must. How can you endure outside the castle? There is little friend-

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ship in the world for the church's outcasts; the psalm-bellows are vindictive enemies. They beat earls in the end. But—by those stars I swear it!—I will help you while life and my wit last; for I love you, Lucas, and when the drudgery is threatening to break your heart, as it may do, I will remind you of the nobler dreams. I will teach you what little I can of swordsmanship and archery, so that you may the sooner leave the kitchen to be one of Rudolph's fighting retainers—and perhaps some one else's tyrant yourself. Forgive me! You will never be that, I know; but will always bear yourself worthily in the manly way! ”

“ Like the true knight, Ulf! ”

“ You dream of being knight one day? ”

“ It is among my dreams,” Luke admitted, with colour in his cheeks and shining in his eyes.

“ Then keep the dream, young warrior. Even if it never comes true—keep the dream! ” Ulf curled his lips sarcastically at his own enthusiasm, and went on sardonically: “ Knight or jester, baron or scullion, all will be one—dust to grow cabbages in—some day. Yet,”—his real self breaking out again—“ true knighthood is a grand ideal—the best we have left to us, now. Courtesy, constancy, truth, gentleness, humility, bravery—

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those are the marks of the true knight. How few true knights there are! Here is the castle. Phew! I am late; I must run. Wait beside the entrance till I come again!"

Ulf ran on, sprang with large strides over the drawbridge, and through the guarded portal in the large iron gate.

Luke followed shortly after. As he went he examined with awe and wonder the great stronghold, which pointed grey turrets at the pale stars. Power and pitilessness seemed written over that cold and frowning front. What was waiting for him behind that iron gateway? Drudgery, shame, hardship. But what if there were? He was prepared to face the worst that could happen. Life is no game of feathers for the poor.

Beyond that portal waited the new life. Monks and outlaws now would be left behind. A new existence was beginning. With which kind of old life would the new life link—with the moral slavery of the monastery, or the immoral liberty of the forest? Perhaps with neither—perhaps with both. He realised the weakness of the individual in comparison with the strength of that Will which some call Fate, and others—God.

There was no use making guesses about the

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future. That was not the key to open the house of fortune. He was resigned to that fact. It was his duty to take what offered, and do his very best with it. He learnt this truth in those minutes of waiting.

It is not we who set our feet among the problems, but another, whose puppets we are.

CHAPTER XVII

EARL'S MAN

WHILE Luke waited without, he could hear, as a confused blur of sound, the noise of the feasters within the stronghold. Presently Ulf came, and bade him follow. They passed the warders at the gate, who glanced at Luke surlily, went over a stony courtyard, loud with the sounds of iron-shod feet, and up winding steps, into the great hall.

The confused noise, the tangle of tongues, and ringing of cups and dishes, with the stifling heavy heat, afflicted Luke as though the place were a foreword of Pandemonium.

Ears and eyes were dazed by the glaring scene; all was so rude, barbarous, bizarre.

At the centre of a long raised table sat the lord of the castle, Earl Rudolph, a hard-featured, long-bearded, grey man, whose restless eyes glanced keenly from under protuberant brows. He wore a loose purple gaberline, richly decorated. Round his neck was a thick gold chain. A

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sword in a jewelled scabbard hung by the back of his chair. He frowned at his thoughts, as, with ever-active fingers, he toyed with the stem of a wine-cup.

The guests who sat at his table, and the subordinates and retainers beneath, were noisy, hilarious, and familiar.

All were brightly, some richly, dressed. Orna-mented daggers were the only weapons worn; but swords, lances, and shields were ranged or hanging against the walls, from which were suspended lazy banners, rent and stained. Torches in their sconces spat and flared.

Ulf continued his way along the centre of the room, between the retainers' tables, until he came to the platform on which the principal table was set. There he squatted, and with his bauble stroked and tickled a great hound, one of many dogs sprawling there.

Luke, following Ulf's counsel, remained just within the doorway, in the shelter afforded by some loose tapestry, curiously watching the scene of tumult and splendour.

Eight young minstrels—in gay parti-coloured hose and feathers and fine laces—were tuning lutes and testing pipes, preparatory to making melody.

The Earl uprose. There was a shout, then.

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confusion of tongues and gradual silence. Every one strained ears to hear his speech—oratory brief and blunt.

“ Good health to our ladies.”

The men sprang to their feet, shouting, “ Our ladies! Our ladies! ”

Cups, wine-laden, were raised in celebration. A chorus, more jolly than refined, was begun by the minstrels, and joined in thunderously by the excited men.

Luke was staring, fascinated, at the scene. Here was chivalry! he thought. His eyes sparkled. Here were men honouring women: men-of-arms pledged to fight for the weak, to help the oppressed, to honour the beautiful and the pure. He looked around curiously at the ladies present. They were lolling, smiling, simpering. Their loveliness was beyond his dreams. He had not hitherto seen so much beauty. In the monasteries woman had been a trap for sin, a loveliness to avoid. But now—!

Our ladies! The clamour of the gallant was still undiminished when Luke's eyes, ranging along the lines of seated beauties, were stayed. At the end of the table where the chief dependants sat was a girl, impressively beautiful, slender, shapely, golden-haired, bright-eyed ; her white skin touched with blushes.

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Alys! Luke said to himself, while his heart throbbed fiercely.

Was it Alys?

By her side stood a tall man, bearded, wearing huntsman's garb. Luke remembered all he had ever known of Alys—what was said on the occasion of their meeting. That must be her father, Godfrey the hunter, next to whom Alys would properly be sitting. It must be—it was Alys! Luke's eyes rested with adoration and delight upon the beautiful face. Down, deep down into the wonderful depths of love he wandered. Under the spell the magic maid unconsciously was weaving, he fell; till his soul, expanding in the ether of its own happiness, dominated.

He was a new being, winged with joy, living for that delicious while a roseate existence, touching the lighted summits of absolute happiness, filled with a triumphant confidence and content. He loved, he loved—that was all he knew, all he wanted to know in those moments of rapture.

The toast was drunk, the vociferous noise subsided. The minstrels sang again and again. Choruses heartily rendered by the retainers made echoes in the rafters above; throughout the merriment, in the intervals of pause, Ulf's quaintness of humour and deliberately maladroit snatches roused bursts of laughter, which the

Earl's Man

Earl led boisterously. Through it all, Luke, standing in the shadows, watched the girl of his life.

Among the guests at the principal table, some five places to the left of the Earl, sat a youth handsomely and richly dressed, who could drink and jest like a man's man, and kiss with glances like a maid's. He laughed and sported with wit, and ogled the ladies—Alys especially—in a manner so open and unembarrassed that Luke, watching him, felt embarrassed and ashamed.

At last the revelry lagged, and the Earl's rising gave the signal for it to end. He, with his immediate guests, passed from the platform, down the side of the hall where Luke was standing.

Next to the Earl, almost at the noble elbow, Ulf shuffled, still uttering jest and gibe to make and keep genial his master. The merry-man now had policy in his wit-making. After him came three ladies of most excellent beauty—nieces and daughter of Rudolph. Following them swaggered Berlyn, the youth of eyes, who as he passed parallel to Alys, gave a bold glance—Luke's heart went cold—and received one as ardent in return.

The Earl had noticed Luke long before the evening's revelry was over: and, knowing him to be none of his men, stopped to question. Ulf was ready to help with the answers.

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“ You were swineherd at the monastery,” was the Earl’s summary, when Luke’s outline of history was finished, “ and want to be stableman here? Ulf your surety! We can’t apprentice him to you, Ulf; his face is too saturnine, too full of the thinking which oppresses, to make wholesome mirth from under a fool’s cap. Take him to Barbary in the kitchen, and when he has fed and put on the livery, Spen-of-the-stables shall set him to work. Good-night, rascals. Come, Berlyn.”

While Earl had been talking to Luke, an idle hearkening crowd about them, Alys, by accident with design, had drifted down the room. She glanced in curiosity at Luke, but for a moment only; her eyes—impudence in them—went on and held Berlyn’s.

He, however, being betrothed to Rudolph’s daughter, was unwilling to acknowledge her familiarity so near the Earl, and therefore, rather to escape her attention than from reasons of spite, began to question Luke, who found himself a centre of unpleasant notice.

“ By the shape of your jowl, your father was a fighter. Was he? ” asked Berlyn.

“ I do not know, I had no father.”

“ Wonderful! Did a further miracle happen and you dispense with a mother? ”

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"I know nothing of my father or mother; I was a foundling."

"A foundling! Who knows, you may be a fairy prince stolen by witches and transformed to a state of ugliness, or king of the gypsies in a gypsy's royal disguise. Now, confess, swineherd, haven't you imagined yourself the lost son of a lord?"

Luke in his simplicity was on the point of making confession of some of his unworldly dreams, when the laughter of the men and the glance which Ulf gave him, counselled prudence. He flushed, but made no answer.

"Let the lad be, Berlyn! don't put vain thoughts into humble heads!" So saying, the Earl departed, and Berlyn, with a final significant glance at Alys, followed him. The retainers, standing by Luke, taking the cue from Berlyn, began the baiting of the stranger.

They were rude fellows all, without an ounce of true chivalry in their stout bodies. They could fight, swear, drink, eat. Excess of thought never gave them sleeplessness. Loyalty to their lord was their great virtue. Every one of them would have died without a murmur for his sake, just as every one would have gone silently through torture rather than risk being called coward. They were a company of very first-rate fighting

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men—excellent machines for force and wrongdoing, almost impervious to pain, impervious quite to others' pain.

Horseplay was their pastime. A new comrade was always food for mirth and antics, until he showed how to use his strength effectively. Ulf knew that Luke ran the risk, but he hoped by using his peculiar, though largely unrealised, influence over Rudolph and his retainers, to secure his friend from mishandling till that friend was able to take care of himself.

Berlyn's mockery, however, and the evident shyness of the victim, had precipitated an opportunity. Luke was obviously a fine butt for rude humour. The mischief-makers surged towards him with threats and laughter. Ulf sprang forward waving his bauble, and striving, by beginning the chanting of a favourite old ditty, to direct their merriment another way. He began; but the effect of his effort was lost in the heavy atmosphere of mischief. The jester was seized, his cockscomb pulled over his eyes, and he carefully but firmly pushed through the portal. The door was shut with a clang; the bolts thrust home. Luke was a prisoner. A triumphant shout went up.

"On the table with the lord's son," shouted one.

Luke was bewildered by the din and confusion,

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but calm and patient. He was lifted, pulled and pushed to the nearest table.

“A fight! make him fight!” bawled another.

“Strip him,” counselled a third.

“Strip him! strip him! drench him!” cried others. There was a babel of bad advice.

Swish! A bucketful of water soused him and those of his tormentors who were nearest. It left him breathless and angry. His fellow-victims were swearing wrathfully, giving further occasion for the onlookers' riotous laughter. Luke was furious; but he had wit enough to know it would be futile in his impotence to show anger. So he endured and watched for an opportunity. He was, however, determined not to be a passive victim.

Then an opportunity came. The anger of the men who had shared the drenching had developed into a pretty squabble amongst themselves. For the moment he was forgotten. He sprang from the table, and ran, breaking a way through the crowd towards the door. He just escaped a second deluge. The effort was useless. He was caught and roughly dragged back to the place of prominence.

“Strip him, strip him!” was now the general cry. Prominent in the uproar were the voices of women.

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Luke clenched his teeth and struggled gamely, though very roughly handled. His poor coat was badly torn—one sleeve rent sheer away; but he closed with the nearest man and wrestled fiercely. He threw his opponent down and fell with him, but the odds were too many against him. He was a toy in the hands of the powerful. He writhed and wriggled, dodged and struggled desperately, using all his wits and energies to elude their intention and baffle them, and was aided by their confusion of numbers; but it was all without avail.

He was raised to the table again, his arms dragged back. Then for a moment, he had, through blood-shot eyes, a glimpse of the cruel and merry multitude, and there in the midst—laughing with the best of them—Alys!

The sight of that face of dreams was destructive to his efforts. How could she—the feminine perfection of sweetness and grace—endure to be one of that coarse throng, with the others intent on his shame and discomfiture. She gave the death-blow to his little pride. His hopes shrivelled like scorched flowers.

“ Now strip the dog! ”

The cry renerved him.

With a start and jerk he wrenched his hands away, and turned abruptly. Those who held him

Earl's Man

snarled angrily and sprang at him roughly, wilfully causing him quick pain. He was again powerless.

Another bucket of water had been brought. His resistance had suggested a worse punishment; instead of being used to drench him, it was placed on the ground, and he, struggling but absolutely impotent against so much force, was bodily raised, turned feet-uppermost, and held, his head immersed. He kicked convulsively, breathed water; his head throbbed with pain, his ears ached; he lost consciousness.

Then a loud knocking at the door made the heroes of horse-play cease.

"The Earl! the Earl!" went round in startled whispers.

Luke was summarily dropped; the bucket toppled, water overran, his unconscious form was pushed and kicked under the table, as the bolts of the door were laboriously shot back, the portal opened, and the Earl—Ulf before him—strode into the hall.

CHAPTER XVIII

DRUDGERY AND DISILLUSION

A HUSH fell on the assemblage. All—the old as well as the careless—were awed by the Earl's stern presence.

“Where is the stranger?” he asked.

There was confusion and the buzz of many voices. The men, moral cowards, nearest Luke, stooped and raised him, urging, commanding, imploring him to pass the incident off. Luke had already regained consciousness. The habit, unlearned, inherent, of shielding and forgiving those who required protection and pardon, spoke through his lips.

“I am here, lord Earl!” he answered.

His head was swaying and dizzy, his eyes temporarily blinded, his body ached, and was cold from the drenching. His speech was weak and faltering, yet so silent was the great room that every word could be clearly heard.

“That is well,” said the Earl significantly.
“Swineherd, go with Ulf.”

So ended Luke's public initiation into the new

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craft and fellowship. Henceforth he would be Earl's man.

That night he slept on the straw-strewn floor of Ulf's cell. He had doffed his old sheepskin and put on the coarse blue livery of Rudolph's lowliest servers. Humble though his office was, he felt to the full his new responsibility. He was Earl's man. One of the company of the chivalrous.

His position and functions were, in sooth, humble enough. Every one of the Earl's servitors was his master, entitled by right of custom to use his services; but then, as ever, Luke in his optimism saw only the brightness of the future. He welcomed the prospect of drudgery, regarding it merely as the necessary ordeal which proved men worthy of knightliness.

For hours after Ulf had fallen asleep, Luke was awake. The narrow confinement of the room and the unwonted circumstances, as well as his recent excitement, kept his brain active. Berlyn's questioning about his father, the exalting, disappointing meeting with Alys, the plain fact of the brutality of the retainers—men of chivalry, too!—with multitudinous associated ideas, rushed in tangles through his restless brain, till wakefulness itself brought utter weariness. He was too tired for absolute sleep; too excited, too weary for dreamlessness or forgetfulness. But as night

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wore to morning, he became less aware of the world-sounds about him—Ulf's regular breathing, the crackles in the straw, the distant song of a cricket. His mind, in the twilight state between sleeping and open-eyed consciousness, ruled and was independent of the will.

His unknown father and mother! Who were they? Where were they? Why had he been left to the charity of the monks and Mause? Luke—in dreamland's vanity—giving thought to Berlyn's irony, imagined himself the son of nobility stolen by enemies, hidden in the sty. He had dreams of many might-have-beens.

Ulf turning in the straw waked him sufficiently to draw his mind for a flash from the country of fevered visions to that of uncomfortable reality. Luke, momentarily wide awake, with an effort put from him that series of vain thoughts. King's son or serf's son—in the eyes of the angels it was all one! Blind to externals, they see the soul, and judge from that whether the being be slave or monarch—of himself!

As once more Luke sank into the body-sleep which enwrapped him—his mind was still the autocrat, eyes staring at the darkness—a voice in his brain spoke the word "Peruel."

Luke heard it; but having no key to its significance, did not at once heed it.

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“Peruel,” after a while the voice said again.

Now he sat upright, wondering. Who was that calling? Who—who was called?

The ideas which thronged his mind were unworldly, indefinite; vaguely he seemed to see himself under different conditions, in another environment and estate.

There were weird, shadowy presences. Creatures of dread hovered mistily about him. He was one of them, though not entirely one with them, amongst haunts of humiliation and woe. He knew himself as a being bound to misery, lost and shrouded, imprisoned by infinite fear.

“Peruel!” came the voice a third time.

Out of the darkness a demonic face shone luridly. Hatred flashed from evil eyes.

“Damned! Damned! Irrevocably damned!”

Luke was horrified, panic-stricken. He threw himself back on his bed, hiding his eyes with his hands: but still could see dreadful shapes and that face of final hate. It haunted the chambers of his brain until, roused to fight the oppressive influences, he sat upright once more and outstared the evil countenance, saying one prayer.

At once it slowly faded: the foul shadows fled. That hour of Hell’s dread was ended.

Then he rested, knowing the solace of wearied peace; but gradually his thoughts returned to

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Alys. His mind brooded over her—he remembered the old glowing hopes and the grey disappointment. A good many illusions were transformed or slain in the process. The new Alys was a different person from that he had bravely expected. In the past he had exalted a myth-maiden, an unfair thing to do. She was physically quite as beautiful as he had painted her; but he confessed the fact with chagrin, in her loveliness there was an essential element lacking—men call it soul!

During that hour of restless vigil, Alys seemed to him to possess two personalities, each competing with the other. There was the unknown maiden, builded of dreams, who shone queenly in grace and faerie loveliness. There was that other, the maid of mocking laughter. How far was she from the Alys of old-time!

His gallantry fought for the better opinion; and so prevailed that in time his idealising faculty displaced the worse Alys. He decided to remember only the girl of visions, and knew well that he loved her. He was hers henceforth, for ever, evermore. Come weal or woe, come glory or shame, come happiness or misery; come what might, Luke had found his life idyll, which could be wrested from him—never!

The new purgatory of toil was soon begun.

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The reign of drudgery was inaugurated before his eyes could close in sleep. Even before dawn he was roused by his masters, and sent to work in the courtyard and stables, in the kitchen, and lastly, in the hall while the retainers fed. Everywhere the most menial, dishonouring, disheartening toil was given him. He was a marked man. Tyranny kept its eyes upon him. When the hall and rooms were empty, he was cleaning and furbishing them, preparing future comforts for others.

At every meal he had to fetch and carry in attendance on his misdoers. From dawn till long after dark, he was hurrying hard at work. Every man was his taskmaster, no one his inferior. His wretched equals were work-wasted drudges: semi-imbeciles, toil-deadened in soul and intellect. Had it not been for the guarding love and care of Ulf, Luke could not without breaking have endured even one of those heavy days.

There was in the beginning little surcease of labour. He had to consume what food was given him while he worked. The only solace he had was during the too few hours of night when, though wracked and aching with weariness, he reclined in the little turret chamber, whispering confidences with Ulf, and hoarding his dreams.

Luke strove manfully at his labour; and, gain-

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ing skill and confidence with experience, was before long able to get through it more rapidly and easily. Still he was in fact a serf, unable even to go by himself away from the castle. All the recreation he had was with Ulf, who taught him what he knew of swordsmanship, spearman-ship, and the uses of the shield. Luke practised eagerly, and soon gained passable skill and readiness of fence.

Ulf gave up his own liberty to bear his friend company, often sitting with him in the winds and hidden solitude of the keep's roof, gazing from the battlements over the stretching countryside, with its panorama of brown-green woods and forest, hills in the blue distance, gleaming, curving rivers, and the grey monastery of St. Dunstan, in the near west. Often Luke watched the place of his earlier life—and watching, wondered. What an age-long time seemed the handful of weeks which had passed since Hilary and Mause were closely in his life! Memories came to Luke while he sat among the turrets, and also dreams—with Alys in the foreground of those dreams. But, alas for his ideal of Alys!

One day while Ulf and he were on the battle-ments talking, Luke saw a couple, walking as lovers along an avenue. No one but he, situate where he was, could see them.

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Ulf watched the grey come into his face; but considerate as always, gave no sign that he saw.

Alys was walking secretly with Berlyn; repeatedly they kissed. Their progress was a page of lover's history.

Berlyn was betrothed to the Earl's daughter. That hidden association with Alys could only bring her shame.

Luke sprang to his feet, tearing his eyes from the vivid picture that fascinated and seared them, and with a muttered excuse to Ulf, ran down to the kitchens to deaden with labour his pain. Ulf peered over the battlements, in search of the sight that had stung Luke. He saw, and knew that his heart had grown hard against Alys. He loved Luke beyond all living men and all memories—save one. He had the will to kill Berlyn then.

Meanwhile the swineherd become Earl's man knew the agony of jealousy. The most beautiful illusion of his life was in danger of being dispelled; but even yet he clung to his idyll, hoping for any explanation that would justify the scene he had witnessed. He could not bear to lose his confidence in Alys. So strange is it with humankind! Through every hour of many a hard and heavy day Luke fought, mind and heart, for his old ideal of Alys.

There followed a period of anguish. Days

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passed. Luke's soul journeyed through a valley of shadow—the shadow of sorrow. He was tried in a heavy ordeal, and only after great suffering, passed the trial. That ordeal of pain made him a man—noble, tried, true.

During the leaden and grievous months of that winter of misery and heavy labour, many of Luke's ideals were endangered. Most of the glowing hopes he had taken into that knightly house had come to be shattered or threatened with decay.

The Earl he found a strong, unscrupulous ruler, never hesitating to remove summarily any obstacle that lay in his will's way. On one morning, while Luke waited by the entrance with a pair of hounds in leash, he saw Rudolph strike a weakling in the face with his iron gauntleted hand, sending the unfortunate blood-blinded away. He heard him, too, within the succeeding hour, give abrupt orders for an old widow's poor hut to be burnt, because gossip had brought to his ears a tale of mischief cast on his cattle through the power of her evil eye. Yet had Luke faith in the Earl's justice. He knew it would be hard justice, merciless, but justice still. Luke had absolute faith in that.

The knightliness he had looked for in that martial court was all one vicious fraud. The retainers were—rascals! The phrases and cant

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of chivalry were often on their lips; but none of them—whether knight, or squire, or man-at-arms—lived in truth the least letter of those phrases. The canons of chivalry were to them as a dead creed. The weak they despoiled; the poor they robbed; the innocent they wronged. The outlaws of the forest, with all their riot and lawlessness, were in point of honour and true manliness not one whit their inferiors. As for Woman, they lauded her vociferously; but it was lip-loyalty, mouth-service. Their ideas of Woman were brutish and uncleverly cynical. There were budgets of tales afloat about their ladies. Alys herself wore the ugly glory of an ill-name.

Disillusion on these and kindred subjects crept over Luke's mind. He fought against the admission that they were ideals decayed; and Ulf, knowing his despair, seeing his need, helped him; but how, among so many witnesses to falsity, could such disillusionment be resisted? Ulf sympathised deeply and helped loyally, but what could be done? There was nowhere else to shelter him—no other to comfort him.

Luke at last lost all his illusions about the knights of that court and their chivalry. It was illusion which went, not faith in true knightliness.

His illusions faded like dead leaves in an autumn wind, but he kept his own pure knightliness. In

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the lonely silence of his life he burnished his purposes, vowing that, though he wore no spurs, and was—would be ever, perhaps—only a scullion, he would be true till death to his own created knightly ideals, enduring its harsh servitude devotedly and with faithfulness. Ulf, who with all his spoken cynicism saw behind the shadows, encouraged him to the keeping of these ideals.

So the fight went on.

CHAPTER XIX

RECOGNITION

WEEKS passed, and Luke became more restless. He laboured hard, earned the fool's name from his fellow-slaves for his duteous earnestness; but he found no surcease from despair.

Circumstances grew worse and worse. Cowardice, cruelty, selfishness, brutishness, threw shadows over every hour of the living day. Ulf alone brought sweetness to him. Alys—Alys—!

Winter had gone. The month of the cuckoo had come. The flower-world wakened; the young leaves called to him, bidding him in the name of Nature, to fly from bondage and regain the lost freedom.

What was the use of that futile life? Better rejoice and die in the open world—his requiem sung by the winds that know no masters, than endure the doom of worthless servitude.

Luke told Ulf he must escape and go. The jester knew in his heart that the hours of farewell were near; but, dreading worse possibilities of the future, and hoping for an amelioration of conditions, he implored him to endure and stay.

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So Luke, for love of Ulf, remained and strove bravely. He was not helped by seeing Alys a wanton; but he hid his love, and served the pettily tyrannical retainers patiently.

He was one morning working ostler in the courtyard, grooming a palfrey for that daughter of Rudolph whom Berlyn was soon to marry, when he heard shuffling of footsteps behind him.

His heart's blood ran cold. He peered round anxiously. His fears were true; his ears had heard rightly. It was a monk from St. Dunstan's Monastery.

The man of God was advancing towards Luke for information, when he stopped abruptly and stared with stony eyes. He had recognised the excommunicated swineherd. Malediction was frozen on his face. He said not a word, but spat on the ground and hastened from the courtyard and castle.

Luke's thoughts and emotions were whirling and excited. Some retainers and serfs who had been busy with their cleaning, gathered curiously about him. Their looks were not unkind. One of them—a burly fellow, in a torn jerkin—called to him:

“Father Bald-head blessed you with his holy water—why?”

Luke looked up flushed. He tried to speak, but

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could say nothing. There was ominous dread in his heart. Why could not he be left in peace?

On the next day there was a mission of monks to the Earl. Luke did not see them come or go; but half-heard gossip told him of their visit, and that he was the occasion of their call. He learnt, not with a great deal of comfort, that the Earl had sent the shavelings away "with flies in their ears."

This encounter with the monks had on Luke one curious indirect effect. It roused in his mind a vivid yearning for some of the associations of the old life; and, added to the present call of the Spring, made him very restless. He came to pine for freedom. He was as a caged soul. He must get out, he must get out; again to be with Nature in her temple of trees.

He determined to go that night. He whispered his need to Ulf, who quickly cognisant of its urgency, promised privily to help him, on condition that he returned before sunrise on the morrow.

So, that night, after his late labour was done, Luke, screened by the anxious jester, walked over the lowered drawbridge, past a wine-bribed chief-warder. After a little while Ulf crept back alone.

In the excitement of renewed liberty, weariness and heartache were forgotten. Luke breathed deep breaths and exulted. He was free as the wind once more; and as though his feet were

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helped by Æolus, sped over the grass, towards old haunts and places of hallowed memories. His heart sang loud laudation!

How fresh the night seemed, and sweet with the scent of violets. In the worship of gratitude to the God who governs, he raised his arms to the dark sky; then again ran on with eager feet.

Mist gathered and drizzle fell. The grand smell of the earth greeted his nostrils and gave him gladness. He threw himself prone, to realise more and more his nearness to Mother Nature. He was as a free spirit of the wild wood.

He entered the avenues where years before Kelp and he had tended the pigs—where he had met little girl Alys, argued with Ulf, asked help from Hilary, and first crept after Truth the mystery.

It was too dark for Luke to see, but his feet were familiar with the way, and he could greet with recognising fingers, trees and bushes—old comrades.

Ghosts of dead memories crept about him.

He visited the once-familiar haunts, avoiding only that thicket where in boyhood's dream-days he had throned the idealised Alys.

Lightness of heart left him as quietly as a shadow. He approached the monastery. Slowly he crept along the well-remembered way. His

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heart knew the pain of tears; it seemed as if nothing there was changed. The very ruts in the road seemed just as he had left them. He paused by the long barn—his birthplace—and, with tears in his eyes and sorrow in his heart, listened to the breathing and moving of the swine. He longed to open the door and enter, but dared not.

He crept across the meadow towards the chapel. Lights gleamed through the eastern window. He hoped, even then, to hear monks chanting; but it was long after compline, and the monastery slept.

He came to the hut where he and Mause had dwelt. Was she there still? He touched the door with caressing fingers; and, remembering her love, prayed in his heart for her and blessed her. He hungered to be with her, to give her son's love once more; but the memory of the last dark scene was bolt-and-bar against the fulfilment of his intentions. He crept away very quietly. That was his last farewell to the monastery of the Holy St. Dunstan.

As he went, his heart lightened. He became hopeful, even glad again. Once more he was buoyant with the living joy of liberty—reaction from those heavy months of imprisonment and grey despair. He was the old true Luke once more. He ran in the sheer joy of life—but where to should he run? . . . To the cottage where

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Lilith had dwelt! Memory of her gave life to the old problems. He relapsed into walking, and thought.

His mind was then like his body—free. The castle walls had imprisoned him more than he knew. He remembered with renewed force the old difficulties, the old ideals, the old hopes. The visit to the monastery had revived his true self and released him.

He reached the lake. The drizzle had ceased. Slowly the mist had lifted and dispersed. Faintly through the clouds the moon shone. Luke could see dimly the water and the white cottage with fir-trees surrounding it. He went to the hillock, where, on the eve of his excommunication, he had seen a vision. There he sat and, sitting, remembered the dream. It came to him at a flash. In his mind he saw again angels and heard their call to him.

What was the name by which they had called him? He tried to recollect. He had heard it not once, but many times: yet had always forgotten it, had never been able to recall it. This was the first time he had remembered the fact of the mystic name. But, what was that name?

Peruel!

He heard it—he did not remember it—he heard it uttered by a most sweet voice.

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His blood ran cold, then hot with strange happiness. He was getting a glimpse of the truth. Revelation—recognition—came at once. He knew himself now as the angels knew him. He was for that little while not Luke—swineherd, outcast, serf; but Peruel—Peruel! That name linked him with the spirit-world.

Peruel!

Again he heard the voice.

“ I am here! ” he answered, rising, and looked upwards. He was one of a heavenly company. Wondrous, glorious presences surrounded him; love shone in their faces, harps and lutes uttered harmonies, a melody of holiness breathed from their lips, blessings lived in their eyes. Luke was transfigured. He trembled with awe—and happiness.

“ O God, O God! ” he cried in rapture, his heart all worship. “ O God, O God! ”

He gazed entranced, and wondered.

Then, in a spell wrought by the music and brightness, he knelt, hid his face in his hands, and wept.

“ Peruel, are you penitent? ” asked a voice.

“ I am penitent,” Luke’s lips answered earnestly.

“ Not yet! Not yet! ” came an appeal from far behind him. “ Not yet! Not yet! ” said the angels; “ His pilgrimage is not yet done! ”

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Luke listened to these mysteries, awed, lost in the greatness.

He ventured to gaze upward again. Here was the Truth. All this was true, beautiful and true.

The princes of the spirit-world remained there, radiant, glorifying the night with high harmonies, covering the worlds with canopies of praise.

Luke's face reflected their radiance. Men who knew him would not then have known him. His eyes shone angelically. The wonted ugliness and heaviness of his face were gone. He was, indeed, transfigured. The angels recognised him as one with themselves. Peruel! Peruel! Now he feared not, heeded not, the voice which had answered from the darkness.

In that hour he was conscious of his spiritual self; aware, though but dimly, that once in ages long ago, he had been of the angelic company. Rapture renewed in him. Entranced, inspired, in ecstasy, he contemplated, with awed eyes and mind, that gathering of celestial glories.

Slowly the vision vanished. The music diminished. The angels were gone.

Luke knew now; never again would he forget the syllables and significance of his spiritual name. In the eyes of men he might be swineherd, serf, clown. In the eyes of the angels he was—Peruel!

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With the passing of the vision, dawn had come, and Luke returned reluctantly to the castle.

When he arrived there Ulf was watching for and awaiting him. The drawbridge, damp with dew, was quietly lowered. A yawning sentinel winked at Ulf, as Luke crept by. He saw the jester welcome the scullion, but, sleepily, did not descry the glow in the face of Luke.

Ulf was relieved in mind at having his comrade back; but, more observant than the man of guard, he saw something had happened. There was a new light, exaltation, rapture, in Luke's face. "What is the cause of it?" he asked.

"I must tell you," Luke answered, almost beyond power of words with excitement and happiness. "I have seen a vision—most wonderful and mysterious!"

"A vision!" Ulf grunted. He was perhaps a little cross through his long vigil. "Oh, leave that sort of thing to the underfed. I'd rather have a genuine new joke any day!"

They climbed to their haven in the turret. Luke was burning to tell his story.

The wearied jester threw himself gratefully on the straw bed, but Luke remained standing.

"Now, dreamer, for the dream!" said Ulf, watching the exultation wild in his companion's eyes.

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Luke whispered of his night's experience. He explained how, time and again, in his life he had been called by the strange name, Peruel; but, until the night of the vision, had never realised its peculiar significance. By that name, heaven knew him. It was his angel-name. In glowing words, with joyous excitement, he told the jester the tale of revelation.

Ulf listened with gathered brows, as, with keen eyes, he studied the narrator's face. For the first time in their friendship, he misunderstood. When Luke had ended, Ulf gave expression to incredulity.

"You dreamed, Luke. You dreamed it! Visions are imaginings, fancies, which come to unhealthy, solitary people! But you did well in one thing—it is better to dream of angels than of fiends! Tell no one this, Luke, I charge you. If you do, they will deem you mad. Only emaciated priests and lady saints, half-fed and sleepless, have visions. As for Peruel—Peruel! Where is the mystery of that? Fish!"

Ulf was abrupt, incredulous, tired, contemptuous, hard, and angry. Luke was pained by his frank incredulity. But words could not heal the soreness.

The new day had come; he went to his work without further ado. He knew the vision was

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true, that through it he was brought nearer to the long-sought Truth. How could he expect others, who had only his bare word, to see with his eyes and know with his mind and heart? The vision was for him only. Even Ulf must be blind to its significance and actuality. It was for him alone.

As he hurried down the winding stairway he made determinings.

"I will be worthy," he vowed. "I will be worthy."

CHAPTER XX

THE TRIAL OF CHIVALRY

THERE followed revulsion. As if to punish him for that glimpse of reality, Luke was, during the succeeding days, harassed with a tumult of torturing thoughts. In the daytime men misused him. When he had peace from them, his mind was racked with doubts and fears—the fruits of evil suggestions from hidden enemies.

He became for a time despondent. Life had become to him so heavy and so grey. He was reft of much confidence in his fellow-men and himself, when he contemplated the meanness, vice, cruelty, which daily he was witness of. Ah! how far were they fallen from the ideals! And yet, Ulf had endured that life during many years! He pondered on the mystery, perplexed, until he realised the helplessness of the unfriended man in those feudal days. Himself was an example. There were very few—if there were any—who could endure except by eating the sour bread of patronage.

The Trial of Chivalry

The utter hopelessness of his environment roused him at length to moral action. He was determined to end or mend the weakening mischief; and Ulf's blind judgment about the vision made Luke desperate. Come what might, he would not again see shame given and wrong done without protest. He realised that even his weak hands held a duty—to his comrades, the poor, and himself.

After thought and sorrow he came to this decision. There was shame in the passive endurance of evil done. He would protest. That should be the beginning of his true knightly crusade. He would fight, and, if need be, suffer against wrong.

Ulf would oppose this decision; but now he was stronger, even wiser than Ulf. His eyes had been opened.

That was the time and opportunity for a Quixote. The castle of Earl Rudolph was no worse, no better, than every other court of those iron and careless days. Good and bad, as in the monastery, were there commingled. The great and petty vices of a spoiled time were there enclosed; and platitudes and shibboleths, which had forgotten their own virtues, were the sole force wherewith to combat them. It was fighting giants with shadows.

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So Luke gave himself deliberately to the service of quixotism, knowing well his weakness, and being equally aware of the sacrifice he would have to make. A fool? Of course, he was a fool, but it is the fools with divine folly who are the ruined fore-runners of progress. Over their foolish bodies, crushed, marches the Future!

The preparations for Berlyn's marriage now went on apace, and Alys wasted herself. She had become desperate, was shameless in her love-madness. The unclean gossips chattered and smirked. The folk of the castle watched her jealousy, her wantonness, her poor efforts at any cost to win for permanence a weak and wavering fancy; and in their spite and narrow envy, they smiled.

Once more the worthless triumphed, and the popinjay was victor. Berlyn, pleased and flattered by her wild and foolish homage, enjoyed and despised the love she offered, forgetting the sacrifice she made. How the Earl's daughter, his betrothed, regarded the sacrifice, need not be written. There is a shame which must be suffered in secret. Berlyn's bride knew it then and afterwards. On the day appointed, she was wedded to Berlyn.

Alys, clad in white and carrying flowers, being one of the bride's ladies, watched her lover married,

The Trial of Chivalry

while anger tightened her pale lips. Friends and cronies watched Alys.

That evening Luke actively began his play of quixotism. He had, so far as possible, weighed every aspect and consequence of his determined conduct, with all the optimism necessary to rashness.

Young Quixote was asking for a miracle. Fully aware of the risk he ran—death might easily be the end of it—he was willing for what he believed was duty sake to run that risk, and characteristically came to believe he might be successful.

But with all his hopes and optimism, he dared not confide in Ulf. For the first time in that history of a friendship, there was a rift in the mutual confidence.

There was among Luke's brethren-in-toil a half-witted, heavy fellow, whose clumsiness made his willingness especially embarrassing.

This man of futile hands was serving a retainer who wolfed his food. Luke had long known that boor-master, Wallon, as a mean bully, among the worst of a bad crowd. The server, in his undue willingness, happened to spill liquid on Wallon's sleeve; the mischief was trivial, but there it was! The bully stared at his sleeve, then at the trembling servant. He swore an oath of many colours, and rising, hit the fellow a blow deliberately, full

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on the eyes. He fell sprawling, faint and bleeding.

Luke's opportunity! The occasion for action had come! His heart was hot with the detestation of cruelty. He ran forward; stared full into the heavy face of the bully, and cried:

“Coward! Coward!”

His voice rang challenge through the hall. Every one heard it. The Earl, too, checking his laughter, which Ulf's humour had roused, rose and watched the commotion. The jester, recognising Luke as the centre of the turmoil, sprang from his perch before the chief table and ran to help his friend. There was hush, with investigation; then clamour of tongues. Words of anger, ridicule, enquiry, combined with some laughter, swelled the confusion.

Wallon was mazed by Luke's daring. He stood staring, bewildered; till a comrade opposite, whose wits were less sluggish, bellowed out a reminder of the insult.

Then he acted. He stepped hurriedly over the bench on which he had been sitting, and rushed, with fists clenched, to hurl himself on Luke. Then the unexpected happened—Luke met him, not in the spirit of the martyr, but in the spirit of the man. He knew he could not get chivalry or fairplay from that opponent; so he sprang and hit.

The Trial of Chivalry

The bully received the blow and staggered, waving his arms wildly to retain his balance.

There was the swish of knives and daggers drawn; an angry, ominous muttering. Luke had played the Quixote—called for his miracle—found a deluge.

One behind him struck his arm, driving him forward. He was hustled, and attacked by many.

“ I claim true fighting—fair dealing! ” he cried.

“ Fair dealing and fair play! ” was echoed by one voice—Ulf’s.

The appeals were made in vain. A metal winecup, wielded by a sure hand, struck Luke heavily behind the ear, and felled him, stunned. Angry men rose about him. Wallon kicked the prone body.

“ Fair play! Give him fair play! ” cried Ulf. He threw himself on his friend, pleading for, protecting him.

“ Fair play! ” Wallon answered, his little red eyes blinking wickedly. “ This is the fair play he will get,” and again he kicked the prostrate body. Ulf thereupon clutched the bully’s knee, and pointed to a brimming winecup. Wallon forthwith drowned his present wrath; while Ulf, his eyes fiery in a pale face, lifted Luke, and carried him toilfully out. No one challenged the passing of the fool and his burden.

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The Earl called to Ulf; but Ulf did not hear or heed, and unprevented, went; bearing Luke, with the assistance of his old friend; the complaisant and bribable man-of-the-guard, up the winding stairway to his turret room, and placed him, still aswoon, on the straw bed.

Ulf found himself saying something suspiciously like a prayer. With hurrying, tactful hands he tended Luke until he revived. The look of love which lived in the awaking eyes was full reward for all his effort and affection.

“ Luke, Luke, must you make this madness? ” he pleaded during the subsequent period of confidence.

In those sacred minutes the recent misgivings were confessed away.

“ I shall always trust—always love you, Ulf! ” was the end of Luke’s answer.

The next day he worked as usual, but the world was changed for the worse. The old persecution had been with whips; now it was with scorpions—the advisers of Rehoboam prevailed. Every man seemed his enemy, active to hurt him. It was impossible for the scapegoat to do right. His masters’ minds were biassed, and their hands heavy. Not the least malicious of his persecutors were his petty equals, his work-fellows, whose misfortunes he had hoped to help.

The Trial of Chivalry

The martyrs had some consolation in their pain; they had at least the comfort of exaltation, while suffering their ways through shame to glory. Luke only knew, what all but Ulf were pleased continually to tell him, that he had been the silliest of fools, and had, out of this nettle danger, plucked nothing—not even the gratitude of the one he had championed. That clod openly flouted him, siding with the masterly majority.

The retainers were, of course, Luke's worst enemies. He had threatened their especial privileges. It was less by positive violence than by a continuous series of petty insults and wearing harassing tasks that they tried his spirit. From dawn almost till dawn returned, he was on his feet, being and doing, so haunted by wrong and over-work that even in sleep, having troublesome dreams, he could not rest. Mind, body, and soul underwent a sustained and exhausting trial.

Luke, passionately endeavouring to keep patience, endured without word of complaint. He had struck for his work-fellow. He never struck blow for himself. Pluck and the passion for duty kept him from failing. He was nerved and strengthened by what dreams could still come, and by his simple pride. He saw himself as a white knight, striving for the cause of the wronged and the weak. These troubles he accepted as an

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ordeal to test his strength of will. He would endure—he would endure till death! That was his heart's vow.

The Earl appeared indifferent to Luke's outbreak, but he was not so. When first he heard its details, he commanded a summary flogging—he would brook no rebellion against his men-at-arms; but on this occasion, Ulf was able to use his powers of persuasion over Rudolph. His jests, japes, fool-verses, and cunning wit hid some real influence. Intellectually, he was more than a match for any of Luke's enemies. Even the Earl had sometimes occasion to dread the ironies of his tongue. Ulf, by a witty appeal, saved his comrade on this occasion.

The fatal finale came on a day when Rudolph was exercising his notions of "justice" in the hall, the retainers, armed and accoutred, ranged about him.

A woman had come to claim redress from one of the Earl's company. Her husband, a woodman, while working in the forest, had been set upon, mishandled, and so severely maltreated that his life was despaired of. Want and care had thereby invaded a simple home.

The human cause of this evil was—Wallon.

Luke, passing the portal, carrying tressles, looked into the hall and recognised the woman.

The Trial of Chivalry

It was she of the flower-covered cottage, who, seeing his need, had fed him on the day of his dismissal from St. Dunstan's.

Luke bore his burden to the place appointed, and then ran back to the hall, entering and standing behind the retainers. He was, before the woman said a word, her champion and advocate.

He fell to studying complainant and offender, comparing them. She, evidently work-worn and care-weary, but open, gentle, kind, her heart softened and sweetened by life's small joys and burdens. Then, her opponent, Wallon, who tried, while the woman arraigned him, to look like injured innocence.

The woman had told her tale. Many hearts there should have been moved by it. Emboldened by the wrong done, inspired by the needs of her husband and children, she had pleaded as simplicity inspired.

Luke listened, touched and pitiful.

That was, to him, the trial-hour of Argovian chivalry.

He felt his sleeve pulled sharply, and looked eagerly behind him. It was Ulf.

"This is no place for you, Luke," was whispered. "Go, I entreat you. If you stay, it may be dangerous."

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“ Dangerous? I do not understand.”

“ Ah, but I do. You will hear things and see things which will wring your heart. You—in your own way—will flash out; and then—where is my friend—and your shelter? ”

“ I must stay, Ulf! She helped me in my need. That woman helped me! She has been grievously wronged. She must have redress and justice. Let me stay. I have faith in the Earl.”

“ No, Luke, I pray you earnestly, go! You cannot help in any way. Go! Go! ”

The youth looked in sharp enquiry at Ulf. He noted his earnestness, valued the love which prompted the pleading, but that woman needed a friend and champion. She had helped him. He must help her. Was not that knighthood's duty?

“ I must stay,” he whispered.

Anxiety troubled the jester's eyes. He shook his head, sighed sadly, and crept away. Shortly after, Luke saw him, in the fool's way, sitting cross-legged on a stool near Rudolph's feet, nursing his bauble.

Then Wallon told his story. A murmur of encouraging applause went round; which warned Luke ominously that before one of his words were spoken, the men of that court were in prejudiced sympathy with the malefactor.

The Trial of Chivalry

“ Lord Earl,” he cried in a powerful voice, “ the woman is bewitched! I saw a woodman in the forest and besought him fairly—”

“ What did you say? ” asked Rudolph.

“ I said: ‘ I’ll trouble you for a drink from your flask, knave,’ and the churl answered: ‘ My flask is drier than you,’ and flouted me by turning the bottle spout downwards, showing me there was not even a drip of drink inside it, and laughed; so what could I do? I called him an impudent hind, cuffed him on the side of the head, and because I was wearing an iron gauntlet, the foul fellow—and he didn’t want another taste of it—he stayed on the ground. So I took away his axe to punish him, and threw it in a thicket. Now this old wench comes bleating, and pretends I knocked him silly. I, with one small clout, to do that! It’s a fool fable. The fellow’s head was thick, a hammer could not have cracked it. He hurt my hand, Lord Earl, the woman lies, and there is an end of it.”

Here was the opportunity for the justice of chivalry. Luke’s keen eyes were fastened on the Earl’s face. What would Rudolph do? There was silence for a brief, appreciable time. Moments slow-moving passed.

“ You have no witnesses to support your story, woman,” the Earl said at last. “ I know Wallon

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as a gentle soldier—" there was some quiet laughter in the background here.

Luke could endure the uncertainty no longer. He pushed between those in front of him, knelt on one knee, and raised a hand in appeal.

" Justice, Lord Earl! Justice for this woman! "

" Out, cub! " cried Wallon wrathfully.

" Justice, Lord Earl! The man was cruel—he confessed it out of his own mouth."

" Out! " said the Earl curtly, frowning heavily at Luke.

The woman now knelt beside Luke and appealed.

" I pray you for justice against this cruel man, Lord Earl! I have told my tale truly. He has told his. I have not lied."

Earl Rudolph rose in anger, raised a hand commanding silence, and delivered judgment. Luke remained kneeling, his arms raised in appeal.

" Woman, it is your word against Wallon's. You have no witnesses. You did not see the blow struck. Wallon, my man, says your husband provoked it. I take Wallon's word. You have no ground for redress. You can go! "

Luke rose.

" Lord Earl, is that chivalry? " he cried. " She came here for justice. Let her have justice! "

The Trial of Chivalry

Rudolph glared at the daring scullion. If glances could kill, Luke would have withered then.

“Wallon, take that fellow to the gatehouse, and flog him. This must be the last of his mutinies.”

There was a howl of happy indignation from the assembly. Luke's punishment was very popular.

Only one strove on Luke's behalf, and that, of course, was Ulf. He suddenly dropped the merry man attitude, and kneeling before the Earl, pleaded with all his powers on behalf of his mistaken friend.

Rudolph was, however, too deeply stirred and angry now. The first outbreak was bad enough, delivered against the retainers. This second outbreak was worse, being delivered against himself and his own authority. The affair had passed the bounds of tolerance. He ignored Ulf; and then, finding his jester desperately persistent, flamed with anger and hurled him violently backward, sending him sprawling among the dogs.

Ulf picked himself up, and still clasping the shaft of his bauble, shattered by the fall, limped hastily after the crowd who hustled Luke to the gateway, determined yet to do what he might for the help of his friend.

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The sight of the jester limping was so comical, that the Earl and his immediate cronies were restored to laughter by it.

The woman was forgotten by all, except Luke.

CHAPTER XXI

ULF SAYS *BENEDICITE*

LUKE was helpless in the hands of enemies, Ulf powerless to save him. He was dragged and hustled to the gate, his tunic stripped from him, his hands fastened with thongs to an iron ring in the wall, and he flogged with whips, till his back was red and black with blood and bruises. He fell to the ground unconscious—dead for the time being to his pain and shame.

Then, their purpose well effected, the heroes returned to their labours and pastimes, gladdened and gratified by the sense of a pleasurable duty done.

Ulf was in a quandary what to do with Luke. To carry him at once into the castle would be futile and dangerous—an invitation to repeated cruelty; so the day being dry and warm, he persuaded two men of the guard—old cronies who admired his merits—to bear Luke—still in a swoon, the poor flesh all quivering—into the shade of an oak-tree, some two hundred yards away.

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Then, running eagerly, he fetched from the buttery, linen and water for the wounds, and wine.

Very tenderly, deep pity in his heart, the jester soothed and restored his friend. His mind could not appreciate the wisdom of Luke's course, but his heart's love brought full excuse and justification for him. He had long ago realised Luke's selflessness and exaltation of character. He would not now judge, blame, or desert him.

It was long before Luke regained consciousness. The waking was itself a severe punishment. His body ached, throbbed, smarted, burnt with pain; yet all that physical misery was less, far less, to him than the bitter knowledge of confidence deceived, of hopes and ideals blasted. The manliness and chivalry of those Earl's men were arrant frauds, pretence, cowardice. As for Rudolph's justice—Justice!

It was some time—a long time—before he could speak. He lay there mute, watching with red eyes the jester's face, reading the comfort of love in that faithful countenance. When he found speech, it was to say:

“Where is the poor woman? We must help her, Ulf.”

Luke's words found answer to a question Ulf's brain had been all the while asking.

“Truly, we will help her, Luke. She must

Ulf Says *Benedicite*

have departed home. I will find the house, take you to where she lives, and she shall nurse you till you are recovered; meanwhile, we can think what else to do. I will give her food for you, and make it my duty to provide for her till her good-man is on his feet and using his hands again. But now—Luke, you must rest. Drink this; try to sleep. You must stay here. The castle is better closed to you. I will come back after nightfall; for now, I must go.”

The jester having bathed and bandaged Luke, and wrapped him in a horse-blanket and warm garment, left him in the quietude to sleep, while he returned to carry through, with most heavy heart, his fool-duties.

Rudolph and the retainers that day and evening laughed often and loudly at his fancies and phrases. Their spirits were high. They took his witticisms generously, reflected his humours gaily, never for a moment in their thick witlessness dreaming of the pain and anxiety that haunted him. Poor Ulf! In all his weary life, full as it was of disappointment and fictitious merriment, he never knew a worse hour than that, when out of a tired mind he made sport for the miscreants who had wronged, wounded, stolen from him, his friend. But sometimes he threw them barbs within the laughter.

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In the darkness he went again from the castle bearing clothes for Luke, a satchel containing food, and a little money, a sword, and a staff.

He found his comrade asleep; so he waited till he woke, a full hour later.

Luke's pain was very great. The after-aching was worse than the actual flogging—he had most of the first agony with the addition of pulsing fire and the pain of ashamed remembrance. It was impossible for him either to stay alone among the trees, or that night to re-enter the castle. He must find shelter elsewhere, in the cottage of the woman he had failed to help.

Then new difficulties awoke. Luke was too sore and weak to walk; the cottage was distant some three hours' march; there was during the night-time no means of conveyance, horse or cart, to be obtained. So Ulf did the only thing possible. He enwrapped Luke warmly and watched beside him. Not till the stars had paled and dawn broke, and the castle was again astir—lights shining through the grey dawning—did he leave his friend. He fetched more food and comforts, and by persuasion and flattery managed to borrow from Spen-of-the-stables a mule. Then, for the first time in his servitude to laughter, he braved the Earl's anger, and taking his own leave, went wandering.

Ulf Says *Benedicite*

Before the sun rose, Luke was riding south, Ulf at the rein. Although a sword was girded at his waist and money was in his pouch, the departing serving-man felt in no knightly mood. He had all the depression of shameful defeat.

There was little converse between the friends during that toilsome journey. Both were glad when it was ended. The heart of each was weighed with evil omen.

Luke was welcomed with the expected kindness. Ulf, after settling all the arrangements, left him in the good woman's kindly care; and then, mounting the mule, hurried back to the castle at as bold a trot as unaccustomed equestrianism permitted.

Days passed, days of rest, kindness, and pleasant care — the happiest of Luke's life. He soon mended. For the first time he found friends and playmates in children. Their young delight helped him to laugh again. It was medicine to his spirits and strengthened his hopefulness. But he could not stay in that oasis of humanity for ever. As soon as he was properly hale, he was eager to be out in the world, to seek Truth, to do right, to right wrong, with his good arm to win bread and honour.

Ulf paid him brief visits nearly every day. It was one more fine effort of duty on the jester's

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part; only the noblest order of friendship could have made the accomplishment possible. By riding through the early-morning darkness he was with Luke at dawn; and through—for him—most daring feats of horsemanship, could be back at the castle in time to mend the morning leisure of his lord.

Ulf proved himself in those dreary days, even more than before, a man of self-sacrifice. He knew, as Luke knew, that the time of rest and peace must end. He felt, as Luke felt, that its termination might also mean the severance of the ties of their companionship; but Ulf had indeed as great an idea of duty as Luke had; so, hiding his feeling, he neither said nor did anything that could weaken his friend's determination to go into the world, and win or lose along the noble way.

The last day had come. Ulf had given himself leave to make it a whole holiday. He would dedicate all its hours to Luke. They sat and wandered in the wood, as in the old time, conversing. On the morrow, in the early hours, Luke—better armed with experience now than before—was to begin a new struggle with fortune, renewed search after Truth.

Never a happier day had blessed their long comradeship than that one of confidence and

Ulf Says *Benedicite*

farewell. Its happiness was bitter-sweet—it was happiness blent with pain; yet there was so much hope about the parting that each looked back upon it with happiness in remembrance.

All the old problems were lovingly debated, ideals and dreams revived and re-glorified, higher duties determined upon. Luke was called on to play the man: he meant to do so—or die.

The long day passed to its end. The warm sun, having climbed the heavens, had returned to its orange-golden glory in the west. The time of good-bye—inevitable—had come.

There were many words still unuttered; and but little heart for their saying. The two sat, eloquent with silence.

Evening merged into night. The birds ceased their twittering. An owl flew magnificently overhead. A glow-worm gleamed at their feet. The murmur of trees was about them. Then, at last, Ulf found speech.

“ You will fare forth bravely, Luke; and, in misery as in fortune, be true knight. If you fail and need friendship, come back to the castle. While I live you will find me there. Remember this, on no day will the sun have sunk without my having had you lovingly in remembrance—till I am dead.”

“ And by the same token, Ulf, I will remember

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you, my ever-true friend. But—why the word fail? Do you think I shall fail? If so, Ulf, I must die: for I could not return to the castle, a slave to Wallon and those others. I will come back a knight with golden spurs—or not at all.”

“ May you win them, Lucas, son of Kelp! No one will rejoice more to see you, however you come, than one grey fool you have known. I said fail—because—because this is so rotten a world. So rotten a world it is, that I could with an easy heart say—Live your little life your own way, and let the world rot unhelped; for does it ever reward its champions except with ingratitude? I am tired to death of it! Wherever there are men, there is rascality stealing honours which should crown nobler brows. Fools stay in the high places. Honesty knows the smell of the dust. Your true knight in this tawdry world—when you can find him—eats his heart out; while the puppet, the bigot, the hypocrite, the sniveller, the time-server, the liar, the fool, the coward, win. Ah! it is rotten, rotten! God may have made the world; but why has He let men so mar and unmake it? ”

There was silence for a while. Some will recognise exaggeration, prejudice, error, in Ulf's words; but he spoke from out of an honest heart. Then again:

Ulf Says *Benedicite*

"You have chosen hard knighthood, Luke. Be true knight!"

"I will try to be true knight, Ulf; I will try to win."

"Ah, Luke, do so," cried Ulf heartily. "I wish I could be with you to help you, to be your squire, to comfort you when the disappointments come. I fear them. In this blotted existence, it is so hard to keep true purposes and ideals; you will be opposed every foot of your way. It is very difficult to have faith in men's honour and goodness. Everywhere there is decay in the heart of ripeness. Look where you will. What do you find but oceans of evil to a pennyworth of good! You have seen in the Church sham religion displacing true religion; in the castle, sham duty, sham honour displacing true duty, true honour; in the world, I fear you will find cruelty, greed, and selfishness all through. You have started on a desperate crusade. To reform the manners, to change the mind, to clean the thought of this generation. Hey! it might be funny if you were not my friend. You are all the more my friend, lad—I love you a thousandfold more, because you would rather be mad enough to fight the conventions, than rest in base agreement with them. Go, try to purge the world, Luke. It is a giant's task undertaken by a

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stripling. But along that road lies duty. You will be forgotten, but the future may wish to thank the forgotten benefactor. There is the reward if you win. If you fail, you fail: and there is an end of it. We shall all die sooner rather than later. You may as well die fighting the impossible as stifling in a silver bed. Oh, Lucas, my heart of hearts, you are starting on a vast emprise. My heart yearns, but I do not pity you. I honour and envy you. If you fail, you die—but it must be noble—though no man may know of it—to die for love of ideals. Now, most dear heart, farewell! If I had the power of blessing I would fasten on you all the joys and powers which the saints hope are in God's treasury. I am—you know me, Luke, lad—a grey man, with more folly than wit, a fool's fool, wearing livery which the least may mock at and make mirth with; but from the depth of my being, I say: Bless you, bless you, Luke! Be brave always, cheerful always, hopeful always, gentle always. If the world is ever to be better, it will be because of the selfless sacrifice of such as you. So go, my golden knight: win or lose, fight hard and truly. Win or fail, you will always have knighthood in your heart. Live or die—it matters not much which, for the days of life are few—while you live, live for duty. Good-bye, good-bye! ”

Ulf Says *Benedicite*

Both had tears in their eyes. Luke struggled after speech, but could find no words. Ulf seized his shoulders, looking eagerly at him. That was the ending. Ulf turned impulsively and went with haste. Very shortly afterwards Luke heard the hoof-beats of the cantering mule. He ran to the road to see the last of his friend; but already that friend was gone.

The idealist was at last quite alone. Battles waited before him.

CHAPTER XXII

EXIT ALYS

THE unknighted knight-errant began his wanderings early on the morrow. He started with a well-furnished wallet; a modest purse and a good sword hung at his side. The counsel and encouragement Ulf had given him were prominent in his mind; the fair-souled folk of the cottage sent kind words after him. He marched hopefully and steadfastly, along the southward way he had taken once before. He strode with the swing of confidence.

There was, however, still one ideal which he could not, even now, let die without a struggle—Alys! The knowledge that she was then, for ever, going out of his life—that was the dark of his bitterness. But he was destined to see her again: more evidence of the ironical interest which the “cherubs who sit up aloft” take in the little dislikes and wishes of men!

Luke had tramped a distance. He was dusty and travel-stained. To gain ease from the heat and dryness of the road, he walked on the sward

Exit Alys

in the shadow of the trees. Presently he heard voices; and, naturally curious to see, approached the sounds and peered across a thicket. He was surprised to find the travellers people he knew—a company from the castle.

First came two or three armed serving-men, mounted on chargers, leading pack-horses. Then a little distance behind, lonely and sad-looking, Berlyn's unfortunate bride. She, and two ladies beside her, a silent three, rode palfreys. Others in the company talked and had cheerfulness, but not those three. Attendants with more pack-horses followed; then no one for a time.

Where was Berlyn? Luke asked himself. Vague fears crossed his mind. He forced his way through the thicket, and sat by the roadside thinking. He drew patterns in the dust with the end of his sword-scabbard. There had been Berlyn's bride; but where was Berlyn? Then the further query had to come—where was Alys?

The questions were soon answered. A peal of girl's laughter woke the wood, slew the silence. Luke sprang to his feet, stung with remembrance. His body was a prison of all the emotions. He knew wildness of delight commingled with wild unhappiness. It was Alys who had laughed!

There approached him round the bend two—

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Berlyn and Alys—he on a black horse, she on a white palfrey. Luke faced the fact—oh, the horror of it! What was she doing there with him, rejoicing, chattering in the loneliness; while in front, pale, silent, sad, the neglected bride was riding. A thousand agonies and some bitter happiness thrilled Luke's being. This was the last glimpse of his idyll, Alys—the good-bye of his love.

His eyes shone, his thin face expressed the pain and passion of the moment. Berlyn saw him, and without knowing him, glared. Alys knew him: and then—in characteristic diablerie, in wantonness and mockery, in the spirit of careless mischief—reached over and, eyeing Luke as if aware of the wild hopes and passion for her that had held him, whispered to Berlyn. Berlyn laughed scornfully, glared anew at Luke, seized her fingers, kissed them, and put his hand on her shoulder. She looked saucy smiles at Luke—whose heart was now in a turmoil—and bending, caught the purse which hung at Berlyn's waist, robbed it of a silver piece, and, making a pretty mouth—a diabolically pretty mouth—dropped the coin as she passed, at Luke's feet. It rolled and found refuge in a crevice in the dust.

Luke gazed at her passing, entranced by her presence. How sylphlike and beautiful she was!

Exit Alys

She did not look back at him, but went along chattering anew. Berlyn's hand still rested upon her. They passed onward, their horses' feet threw a curtain of dust behind them, which gradually veiled them. Twice in that little interlude, while Luke watched, the two bubbled with laughter and kissed. Then they reached a turn in the road.

Exit Alys!

Luke's eyes fell on the coin which her fair, unworthy fingers had thrown to him. Was the act insult or kindness? Did she know—had she guessed or learnt—of the passion which had burnt him? Had she intentionally used that manner to show her scorn for his love and him? Or did she deem him in need and so drop an act of pity? Insult or kindness, which? Luke, remembering the manner of the smiling and the character of the company, sorrowfully admitted at last that the deed could not have been meant kindly. He knew the girl too well. Alys was at last a lost illusion.

He sat on the road-bank, hiding his face in his hands, enduring the hapless lover's completeness of misery. What fate had brought him to that passing? Why had she acted so? He put his foot upon the coin; it was the gift of a wanton, thrown in impudence. There let it lie! He crushed it into the dust. Yet the piece allured

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him as though magic were within it. His eyes were fascinated by it. He constantly stared at it. Lost illusions may still mean some dear memories. So was it now. The coin was something tangible, reminding him of the little girl who had chattered to him in the wood, those happy years ago. It was—save memories still—all that was left to him of her—the love-idyll of his life.

He heard a raucous voice singing. A sturdy fellow—one of fortune's vagabonds—came slouching along, his feet causing a cloud of dust to trail behind him. His appearance gave Luke determination. That silver—though given with scorn—was too sacred for beggar-man's touch. Luke rose, grabbed up the coin and pouched it.

The vagrant, seeing him, at once began to whine. A diseased wife and numerous suffering children—glibly he ran through the eternal tale. Luke was better able to measure that now; but for Alys' sake—in return for the coin she threw him—he offered the beggar a part of his store of food.

The rascal stopped and stared abruptly, breaking off in his tale of trouble. He looked at the meat and bread; then laughed.

"Dryness is my complaint!" he said, pointing to the bottle fastened to Luke's belt. "What is the liquor in that jolly flagon?"

Exit Alys

“ Water.”

“ Water? Gods of fishes! Water! A jovial companion you! I’m for something with a little more grip in it. Water! Ugh! ”

He passed on, making a wry face; after a few steps to turn and say, “ I’ll take a groat or two if you’ve got it! ”

Luke smiled and shook his head.

“ Bah! ” said the man, and—in a cloudy glory—slouched away.

Not another three minutes elapsed before Luke was again in the presence of the past,—one of its more miserable chapters. He was roused. Man’s anger waked in him.

A company of horsemen—nine or ten—approached, they were some of Rudolph’s retainers, and had been heavy masters to Luke. Among them Wallon rode. All the pain and insults which Luke had endured from that boor and his fellows now stung him anew. Memories of incidents in the long-drawn tyranny recurred and grated. His pride still smarted from the shame of the flogging. He remembered the gross injustice done to the poor woman, his friend. The accumulated wrath, long suppressed and fought down during the many months of bondage, surged with new strength within him. This was the time to assert his manliness. He must protest

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now, or be for ever dumb. Wallon, that liar and bully, must pay something of the debt he owed!

Luke drew his sword, and stood on the grass slope waiting. The men, approaching, saw the glint of the drawn steel, and, handling their weapons, looked warily against ambush. Then finding the stripling assuredly alone, began talking about him, mocking. At last, on recognising him, their mockery turned to contempt and anger; and all reining up, their leader—a lean man, with little sharp-glancing eyes and grizzled beard—asked Luke what he meant by standing there, sword in hand.

Luke had no special quarrel with that poor officer of the Earl; though he, also, had been in the past hard and merciless, and the tone of the enquiry was not calculated to soothe.

“My quarrel is not with you, sir; but I pray you for the shame and flogging I received, and even more for the injustice done by Wallon to a poor misused woman, to let me fight that liar, coward, and scoundrel!” He pronounced the three expletives with particular care.

Wallon had out his sword with an oath; and swearing, dug spurs in his horse's flanks, making the beast plunge and rear. Others among the men laughed, or were angry, as suited their temperaments. Luke waited with evident calm-

Exit Alys

ness for Wallon to dismount; though inwardly he was not calm, long endurance of cruelty and the remembrance of wrongs witnessed having hardened his gentle heart against those offenders.

The officer smiled in a wry way. He signed to Wallon to sheath his weapon; and then addressing Luke, said:

“ You must be moonstruck! An honourable man-at-arms does not fight with a discharged scullion. Put back your blade, boy; and go while the wood gives you safety! ”

Luke answered, still with respect in his voice for the officer:

“ I was a scullion, sir, and worked for my masters with a will; but I am not a scullion now. I bear a sword and am willing to stake my life on my quarrel. I have been for a very long while mistreated by many of you; and by none so sorely and shamefully as by Wallon. I pray you for this while, forget I was ever a menial; but see me as I claim to be—a man with a righteous quarrel, willing to risk his all on the righteousness of that quarrel and the strength of his sword and arm.”

“ Life’s death! ” cried Wallon dismounting.
“ I must spit this oratorical sparrow! ”

“ Hold! ” commanded the leader, sharply.
“ We have duty ahead and no time to waste.”

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“ I’ll split his head open for calling me scoundrel and liar! ”

Again the leader commanded, and the authority he wielded made the disciplined bully pause. Wallon glared with hate in his eyes from among his horsed comrades at Luke, who faced him without flinching.

“ Will you fight me, Wallon,” he challenged him, “ as man to man? ”

“ I’ll thrash an insolent puppy! ”

“ Will you fight me sword against sword, on that grass-space yonder? ”

“ Ay, and flog you again afterwards as I did before. I’ll no longer listen to the prating of a dishclout! ”

He sprang from amongst his fellows, reached the grass; and at once with his sword, without any preliminaries, began the attack. Luke easily parried his thrusts and blows.

Then the leader interposed.

“ Stop both of you! If you must fight it shall be by the rules! ”

“ A kitchen cockscomb! ” sneered Wallon.

“ You touched his blade with yours; he is now entitled to an equal footing. If you had obeyed me you would have ridden on, leaving the fellow to contempt. Now you shall fight him.”

Exit Alys

Luke exulted at hearing those words. Chivalry gave him an opportunity at last.

"I will fight him!" cried Wallon, confidently. Giving his sword to a comrade to hold, he threw off his belt and scabbard, doffed his jerkin and rolled up the sleeve on his right arm.

Luke made no preparations. When they had reached the clearing, he waited warily and breathed a hidden prayer.

All the horsemen, except two, had dismounted to watch the duel. The officer, with his sword drawn, acted as umpire. He enjoyed—thoroughly enjoyed—the passing excitement.

It was not long before the combatants were ready, standing in their places, facing each other.

The officer gave the word. The duel began. Both the swordsmen attacked. There was in those early moments little of merely defensive play. Wallon brought to the engagement the confidence of experience and the belief that his opponent was unused to the long-blade business. There was a grin on his face, half anger, half derision. But he got as good as he gave. He soon knew, by the way his enemy's steel met his, that Luke was not a novice in the swordsman's game.

Ulf's pupil surprised all the onlookers by his dash and coolness. Where could he have learnt

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his art? His fencing seemed inspired. His wrist was firm and supple. He took all the points of the opposite blade with easy readiness, and thrust and feinted in return in a way which would have given pride to his tutor. All the while he fought he was sublimely happy. He knew the joy of noble knighthood.

Derision went out of Wallon's face. His grin subsided. He had the wit to recognise a worthy antagonist when he met him. As his subtleties failed, anger grew, and made his attack more deadly. His comrades, who, at first, regarded Luke's pluck and comparative success with some manly generosity, began to reflect their comrade's wrath. They cheered Wallon and smote the fighting ardour of Luke with contemptuous words.

Wallon pressed the attack, but could not penetrate Luke's guard. Once he nearly lost his sword through a sudden unexpected twist of his adversary's blade.

"Finish him!" cried one, standing behind Luke. The umpire officer said not a word, but sheathed his own sword.

Wallon's anger growing, added fire to his energy. He plied his restless blade with increasing fury and rapidity. So vehement was the attack that Luke was forced back two paces.

Exit Alys

Way was not made for him. He stepped against the man who was standing behind him; and that hero of chivalry sharply pushed him forward.

The unexpected jerk spoiled Luke's guard. He lost his reckoning and found the sword beaten from his hand.

"That was not fair!" he cried, the same moment as Wallon's point pierced his arm. The warm blood ran down his sleeve into the palm of his hand.

"Fair!" cried Wallon, coming up and peering maliciously in his face. "Fair, you insolent runagate! You called me liar and scoundrel, now take that!" With all his might he struck Luke full in the face with the fist of his left hand.

The youth went down with a gasp, and beyond all other thoughts, at that whirling moment of utter consternation, he realised that the chivalry of that time and of those men, like all else heroic about them, was an absolute proven lie.

He was no sooner fallen than Wallon put a foot heavily upon him and raised his sword to thrust; but that was too much for the nominal umpire.

"Sheathe, Wallon! let the fellow go. He fought with courage. Sheathe sword! Let him go."

Wallon removed his foot and sheathed his weapon; then, seeing Luke's sword upon the

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ground, he picked it up and with a sharp jerk broke it across his knee, throwing the pieces at his opponent. The hilt hit him in the mouth.

Luke realised nothing of this violence and insult. It was the consciousness of having been treated not by the rules of the game—not in the spirit of chivalry, which obsessed his mind.

When he repossessed his strained and straying senses and stood again, Wallon and his comrades were gone.

CHAPTER XXIII

ONE WITH LAZARUS

THREE years passed—a period of grim ordeal.

During those dreary years Luke went through the depths of want. He knew infinite misery and met it with infinite cheer. Life was to him an angry wilderness, but he overcame its many unkindnesses with the courage that refuses to lament.

He was one with the least, the comrade of the lowest; companion of the lost. He starved steadily and knew all the bitter sweetness of the rejected crust.

He had no friends, and was lonely, very lonely.

He wandered and worked, spiritually unsoiled, through the worst and lowest deeps, and knew to the full that weight of shame, want, and never-satisfied desire which breaks the hearts of ten thousand. He lived amongst the wreckage of men and women—haunted shadows they, in a valley of grey despair; and because of their woes and terrors, his own dreams and hopes faded and became dim.

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He came to know human misery at its darkest and worst. He read the secret pages of the world's real shame. His heart bled for love of the sinners and sufferers, the helpless and the weak. So much—so very much—of that misery was an heritage; so many of the culprits were nothing other than scapegoats for the sins of the fathers. Mystery inscrutable!

He came through hardship and fellowship to plumb the world's sorrow to its depths. There was, indeed, no form of human grief and pain which he did not witness or share—and help to assuage. From the squalid hovel and cellar of living filth to the lazar den with its worse afflictions and hideous abominations, he went ministering and for shelter. In his day the poor came grovelling to the helpers—not the helpers, rich with bounty, to the poor. Luke was all alone in his simple crusade and pilgrimage.

The ban of the Church was upon him. Once only, driven by desperate want, did he approach sacred portals; and then, by a coincidence even more extraordinary than every coincidence must be, the janitor who answered his faltering summons knew him. He had been one of the monastery of St. Dunstan while Luke was swineherd there. Recognising his suppliant, he shut the door.

One with Lazarus

The gloom about the outcast deepened. He lost, for a little while, the undying hope which had buoyed him. It seemed at that moment as if he were utterly lost, and could never get from man a similitude of the kindness he gave. He ran with despair out into the darkness, and, throwing himself rain-blinded in the mire, prayed to God passionately for some help—some answer of light—in that wilderness of questioning and pity.

There came no answer from Heaven. His prayer seemed wasted in the darkness. Luke felt forgotten.

But then his natural bravery came to the rescue of his soul and pride. He faced consequences and fought against despair; and eventually compelled himself to extract hope even out of the blackness of that forbidding sky. He remembered his ideals, that behind those clouds there were stars. He remembered his visions; and gained comfort from his own assurance that Heaven was always watching and shining, then—and ever—beyond the mirk overhead.

So he won himself again.

During the whole of those distressful years he was true to his high purposes. He was the Knight of the Poor. He wrought and suffered and gave. He was the Poor's poor champion. He wore no material weapon. His first sword,

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broken by Wallon, was never replaced. He had now quite lost his old, clinging fancy to compete for glory among men; he came to recognise, in that hard life of slavery and want, what a phantasm and idle shadow the tinsel and trumpeting, panoply and parade of mere shouting chivalry was. He had seen the mouldering tombs of worthy forgotten knights, and, forsooth, knew that when their hearts were cold, and their minds had lost the illusions, they were no better than the hedge-lass and beggar-man whose bones had rotted under a thicket. He had read more than one epitaph which praised a dead woman's beauty, and had sometimes seen the realities, after-death. The duel with Wallon had finally exposed the sham chivalry. Luke never forgot the humiliating lesson he had then learned, and, eager for better duty, took upon himself the rigorous discipline and self-sacrifice of spiritual knighthood. He gave himself sans stint to the battle for right and kindness, and aspired to fight, not in the lists made glad with smiles and purple, but among those who work ever, yet always must want. So he lived to help with bread and hands, and comforted life's luckless ones with deeds of cheer. Some of those he helped came to know and welcome him; but the majority accepted his gifts and forgot. A few there were who remembered

One with Lazarus

sufficiently to whisper of him as "the man with the angel eyes."

Peruel, in sooth, gazed often through those gates of the soul.

Most of the years of service were spent in the neglected parts of the towns. The large and patient helplessness of the poor in those wildernesses of haunted people fascinated and appalled him. The lot of the children—born to the decadence of sordid cities, ignorant of the sun and freedom of God's green country—always brought tears to his heart. Their prettiness, their helplessness, their need—and their doom! Oh, it was all a baffling problem that made him wonder and despair! Why were these little beings born, only to die so soon—flies in the autumn cold—after a dark experience of ugliness, unhappiness, and pain? Why should they have lives, if it was only to know misery? He longed for the truth about this mystery—it was his old, old difficulty in a new guise.

Gradually, out of his harsh experience, he found that larger truth he had sought for—those manifestations of God he had asked for so insistently. Different, very different they were from his anticipations; but no less the vital Truth he had been seeking. As he, with his own hands and good counsel, laboured, so in time he saw misery dis-

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placed by comfort, unkindness replaced by affection, ugliness modified, even transformed into beauty, hatred changed to love. As he worked and gave and suffered, so he found happiness, virtue, hope, growing and strengthening. *Here* was the manifestation divine.

He had in his young impatience looked for angel-presences visibly rebuking evil men, had almost expected to witness miracles wrought among the squalor; but though he had his own joyous visions—more frequent and glorious as his personal misfortunes grew—he had come to know that God's reign is in the heart. His presence on earth is shown through the works of men who obey His laws and are ruled by His love. That was God's way. There was the Truth.

The bully, the wastrel, the coward might seem to go their fatal gate unchecked and unpunished; but it was not so really. Heaven's ways were subtle and more just.

The bully lost his strength and met his match and master. The wastrel soon reached the dregs of his resources. The coward—his life, spent amongst fears, was a constant punishment.

So it was in some degree through the whole gamut of sins. Every vice in due time brought its appropriate punishment.

As Luke advanced in his quiet crusade he found

One with Lazarus

more frequent results. There had been in the earlier time almost infinite disappointments; but somehow, as the years passed, perseverance and patience found their royal reward. There were, to speak with metaphor, only a few flowers blowing in the desert; but—they were something. Each was of his planting, helped and strengthened by his tendence, and represented a human brother or sister relieved from some sorrow or want.

His heart became filled with a great secret joy and boundless gratitude.

So the three years had groaned past; and Luke was, in all respects but age, older by many more than thrice three times that period.

Physically Luke was greatly changed. Insufficiency of food and clothing, with the strain of unending effort of body and mind, had worn him down; till even the fact of being became a struggle. His wasted face bore the impress of weariness and anxieties; it was lined and seamed, as the face of a man several times his age should not have been. His body was emaciated and bent. He became an object for the pity of the kind, the dread of the foolish, the scorn of the cruel. Only his eyes remained luminous and happy always. To men he was ugly and unpleasing; but they could not witness his spirituality. Eyes of flesh could only see the husk, bruised and worn. In

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the eyes of the angels the husk is invisible: to them, Luke—Peruel—was radiant.

Though some loved him, he was contemned of the multitude, and forced into loneliness, knowing to the full that curse of the towns—solitude amid the many. But as the days passed, he grieved less at the fact of banishment; for, as his body weakened, his hidden strength grew, he had frequent visions. Often, while he starved amid squalor, he was illumined and rapt from himself. The place of his misery was lighted with holy magnificence; his glorified self knew harmonies and happiness, beside which the music and joys of this life are as discord and dulness.

As his body suffered, the joy of his mind increased. As his flesh decayed, his soul grew greater with brightness.—As his flesh decayed!

There came to him, with unexpectedness that stunned, the worst of human calamities. Of a sudden he was aware of it. He awoke and found himself accursed.

He had been labouring with bare hands and gentle heart in the worst part of an evil city. The vice, want, black degradation, and begrimed ugliness he was compelled to witness and endure, had reduced his strength to weakness. The little food he had was often bad—stale fish and wasted bread, the bounty of the mean. He had herded at nights

One with Lazarus

with the lowest and poorest—a sharer of wastrel's kindness, a hopeless member in the hopeless army of Nobody's Poor.

He had gone forth gallantly in the morning to work through another day. His throat was sore; his voice husky.

A passer-by, his eyes wide with alarm, stopped suddenly and accosted him.

“Go from the town at once—at once!” the stranger cried, shrinking back and crossing himself.

Luke was frightened.

“From the town?” he asked. His words were hard to articulate—a sign of the disease. “I have work to do.”

“Poor soul! Poor unclean soul!” said the other. “Christ help you! Your work is done. You are one of the stricken—one with St. Lazarus.”

Luke, hearing this spelling of doom, could not restrain a cry, then horror, unspeakable, held him. He stood still as a statue, stricken; frozen with dread.

One with Lazarus! A leper! With his heart all pain, he found words to bless the man, and then started running in a panic; never pausing until he was out of the town, and once more alone in the forest.

Doomed! Doomed!

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He found a pool and looked at his reflection in the watery mirror. The stranger had spoken truly. The beginnings of leprosy were there. He threw himself full length in the soothing grass, and wept.

He remained prone for a long while, till the human fear and sorrow passed, driven away by the tears. Then he braced himself to meet the inevitable. Rising, he walked slowly, praying as he went, towards the house of those—the Monks of Lazarus—whose loathsome and splendid mission it was to help the leprous—and bury them.

CHAPTER XXIV

PERUEL FINDS THE GATE

THE Hostel of Lazarus was two hours' journey away, standing in sinister loneliness at the end of a forest road.

As Luke walked towards it, his mind was a kingdom of grey contemplation.

This was the crown of his efforts—the pitiful end of his dreams! He could never be useful again! Even the few hopes he still clung to—hopes of future usefulness to his comrades of poverty—must be yielded up, sacrificed on the altar of failure. He was a dishclout, worn out, to be wasted.

All about him the world was shining, singing, enjoying its healthy life; a perfect sky, cloud-flecked, domed above. Bird voices made the green avenues cathedrals of lingering music. There was the whirr and buzz of insect life. The grasses waved, the multi-hued flowers glowed, for the last time—for him! To-morrow he would be of the living-dead.

The woods had been his favourite playground

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from the beginning; it was appropriate that the last hour of his free life should be spent amongst their trees and thickets, pools and streams.

He remembered with grateful affection the old monastery wood and the life he had shared there with Kelp, Mause, Lilith, Hilary, and those others; with Ulf and Alys—Ulf!

He sat on the grass amongst blue shadows, feeding his heart with faded memories. Those young hopes and early dreams—aspirations, struggles, sufferings! And this the end of them all!

His mind ran remembering along past journeyings. For a while he was lost in the sad happiness, the bitter sweetness of a lifetime of flitting joys and troubles re-lived.

As he dreamed of ended days, his vivid imagination, reviving old circumstances, persons, things, caused the present trouble to be for a while forgotten. The joys of the finished life seemed greater, the sorrows less—mere faint shadows of themselves. Yes, thought he, at that sunlighted hour of farewell, my life has been happy; I have been greatly blessed.

His eyes lingered on the beauties prevailing; his ears were fully awake to Nature's melodies; his heart, in absolute sympathy with the joys abounding, for a sudden period of moments

Peruel Finds the Gate

knowing splendid forgetfulness, throbbed in harmony with the eternal rhythm of things.

Then sorrow struck him fiercely. He remembered. On the morrow all this infinite gaiety, laud, loveliness, would be as hidden pictures in a locked book—locked to him, till the death of his life.

Reaction supervened. In the new mood, succeeding, the joy of life about him was awry; its sounds rang cracked and hollow, its beauty seemed misapplied; and again, out of the chattering happiness, the word of death boomed as an ominous bell.

Doomed! Doomed! Once more he seemed to hear the hopeless words. So his heart voiced Nature's knell, given in gladness.

The darkness of despondence had fastened closely upon him. His mind was cloaked, his soul seemed shrouded with heavy shadows. Never again could he know health or hope or happiness; and evil spirits, with horrid subtlety whispering in his brain, accentuated the present misery.

His pride lay prone in a nether world of utter humiliation. It was the last and heaviest of Luke's many ordeals. The thought that bit was this: that in his mission to help the weak and the wronged he had failed—absolutely.

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The carelessness, callousness, cruelty, want, ugliness, and misery, which in his later years he had given himself against, would go on, worse or better—no different for his going.

Then came health of mind again. A light was illumined in his heart; for the last time the mood of rancorous reaction went. New hopes sprang out of his eternal store of hopefulness. He definitely thrust aside the morbid depression which had grieved him, and with resolution strode out of his valley of shadows.

He was God's warrior again—confident, determined, aspiring. With raised head and lofty heart he marched doomward.

In the depth of the forest, to the right of the trodden road, he came to a shrine—a painted Christ, weather-faded, hanging from a wooden cross. The sylvan solace, the rippling song of a streamlet, the grateful shade of heavily-leaved trees, appealed to his tired mind and limbs, and bade them rest. So he knelt before the shrine, and watched with fixed eyes the sacred figure, and prayed. He was won into a silent passion of rapture.

A lonely outlaw, ranging through the wood, saw him kneeling, and stared. Something about the praying man was insultingly familiar.

Connol remembered. The old unsubdued fire

Peruel Finds the Gate

of hate surged anew in his savage heart. He swore five oaths, drew blade, and crept.

Luke neither saw nor heard. He was lost to dangers of earth.

The outlaw came close to him and raised the knife. Luke's release was not to be so kind.

Connol noticed the grey hair, the shrunken body; all the signs of suffering and present affliction which the bent form bore, and in the strong man's contempt for weakness and failure—despised. He would not condescend to slay what was evidently so miserable and prone to death. His power of hating was abnormal.

He withdrew for a distance and sat on a treebole to watch. He wondered at the phenomenon of the figure kneeling, praying for so long a while. This was something more than the folly of effort, as in his inexperience and ignorance he had always regarded prayer. This was not ceremonious hypocrisy, a robed professional pose, as—though in other words—he had always regarded the petitions of the priests.

Gradually a wonder happened to him—a strange fear crept over him. It seemed as if invisible presences with which he could have no sympathy were about him.

All the fragments of superstition which had been his mental furniture swarmed about his

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unbalanced consciousness. He found himself afraid.

The strong creature who had braved mean death a thousand times, was pitilessly fearful of his own indefinite fancies, and quaked beneath monsters born of ugly ignorance.

That very ignorance—utter and absolute—added to the sacred dread. He sprang to his feet with a low, moaning cry, instinctively sheathed the knife, and, running forward, flung himself passionately on the naked path behind Luke. In mute agony he stretched arms out imploringly towards the Cross. He could not pray, having never found the faculty; could not even frame definite thoughts; could only lie prostrate there, in a waking swoon, frightened and comforted.

When having found himself again he looked up, it was to realise Luke still kneeling, the shrine before, the trees overhead; but a new voice within him whispered. Connel obeyed its vague command. He crept once more towards Luke—how different the motive—and stooped to touch with superstitious fingers the edge of his garment. Then he fled.

Luke, his rapture of prayer past, rose to his feet with spirit so elate that he forgot the cramps of long kneeling and every other physical metaphysical discomfort that had beset him.

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He had come to accept leprosy as a burden to be borne for his soul's inscrutable good. That was the only consolation to be found in the ordeal he faced. He placed before the crucifix his only offering, the hoarded silver coin which Alys had thrown to him, and went, without further stop, to the hostel of the monks of Lazarus.

He came to it at last—a long, low, gloomy building—and rang a noisy bell.

That moment he made truce with the Church. He went in his weakness, a mute suppliant for pity. The monks took him without question asked. The hopelessness of his physical condition was an adequate appeal. They welcomed him; and, bound in duty by vows and promises, tended him. Their words, their movements, helping him, were as offices for the dead. Luke was then, in fact, crossing the frontier of the Republic of Death.

The following day solemn ceremonies began. He was led into the small bare chapel, the prayer-place of the iron brotherhood, and knelt in fulness of humility before the altar. The plaintive voices of the monks pleaded for him, singing his Requiem.

He was with elaborate ritual robed in black. Mass and Matins were said for him—Mass and Matins for the dead.

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Slowly, painfully, his heart awe-stricken, Luke went through the details of his own funeral. Earth was thrown upon his foot.

Ashes to ashes and dust to dust!

Then was his knell clanged; while mourning voices complained in chorus.

He passed out of the chapel, and slowly approached the door of his living tomb.

As he passed along the winding pathway, seeing only as a haze the white figures about him, though hearing with absolute distinctness the words of their melancholy psalm, he was aware of quickened thoughts, tempting him heavily in his weakness.

The Truth! The Truth! *Is this the Truth?*

Luke prayed in his heart, prayed desperately. But the efforts of the enemies were not yet done.

The procession stopped before a lonely hovel in a sandy waste. There were other hovels, similar to that one, dotted about. Here was Luke's home for the shrunken remainder of his days.

He entered, and knelt, in an agony of abasement, in the place of his living doom.

He heard the voices of the retreating monks still chanting a dwindling chorus, till their Miserere faded away and was done. Then, and not till then, did he realise his loneliness and the full meaning of that silence and solitude. He was

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alone, one of the dead and buried. Rising, he looked around.

Within the hut a hollow was dug. His grave! There were a few ordinary utensils of life—a wooden table, a wooden bed, a chair, sundry oddments of furniture, a cross; and there placed beside the grave the particular possessions, the unique wealth of the leper, distinguishing marks of his affliction and shame—a particoloured hooded robe, with a face-cloth to hide the leprous ugliness which would spread and increase, a wooden clapper, which, whenever, on that limited domain, he walked abroad, he was bound to rattle and sound to announce his coming; and a staff.

So Luke came at last to his own home. His mind realised the import of it all. He cried aloud in sheer agony, then sitting by the table hid his face in his hands and knew soul-darkness.

Out of the darkness there sprang a sudden light; and out of the light a voice.

“Peruel!”

“I am here!” Luke answered. It was not he who answered, but the voice of his soul which spoke.

“Peruel, are you penitent?” came the enquiry.

“I am penitent!” was the answer.

There was silence for an indefinite period; then it seemed as though a weary load, the weight of

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troubled years and problems and many tears, was lifted from him.

Again—repeating that earlier experience, the vision of long before—there was a growth of glorious light, of transcendental brightness, happiness, majesty beyond men's words.

“Peruel, are you penitent?”

Thrice was the significant enquiry repeated; thrice did Peruel answer. Every response was followed by a mighty growth of splendour, and an ever-spreading accompaniment of celestial song. Luke's long-parched, haunted soul knew strange refreshedness.

The leper was lost among the glories. He was comforted, enraptured. There was a season of suspense, with fear-fraught silence. The universe seemed hushed and listening. Eternity was attent, watching one soul, waiting. It awaited a challenge by the Prince of Evil, such challenge as had always been made to prevent the recovery to Paradise of one of the lost.

In suspense of anxiety, Luke lost his rapture. He hungered for rest. Peruel yearned for the triumph that brings peace. He waited—eager for release—at that period of portending judgment. The ages-waited moment of decision was come. Was his ordeal—of an æon and an earth's lifetime—to end victoriously now, or in failure again?

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Luke was now aware that throughout his years of wandering a vague and malignant Shadow had haunted him. For the first time now, the Shade became definite, he recognised the Arch-enemy.

All the pitifulness of his present existence and the woes of his troubled life; all the heroism, humility, patience, selflessness, sacrifice of his time of breathing and of doing, championed him in this hour of eternal destiny.

Luke's record of true honour spoke for him. Its whiteness and holy strength caused Satan, urgent to speak, to be dumb.

Insistently, with fulness of effort, the Prince of Evil strove to make challenging answer. But his pride and power in this crisis were nothing. He found himself impotent in the presence of such valour and virtue.

He fled silently, baffled and ashamed.

So the challenge for which legions waited was not uttered. The wonted arrogant voice was not heard. Satan was worsted. The battle was ended. Duty had won. There was rejoicing in the heights.

Days, months, perhaps years went by. They were unnumbered, their measure was of no importance. Luke's festering body endured; while his mind lived in a perpetual palace of contempla-

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tion, joyous, lighted, jewelled, golden, unconcerned by, unconscious of, the discomforts of fetid flesh.

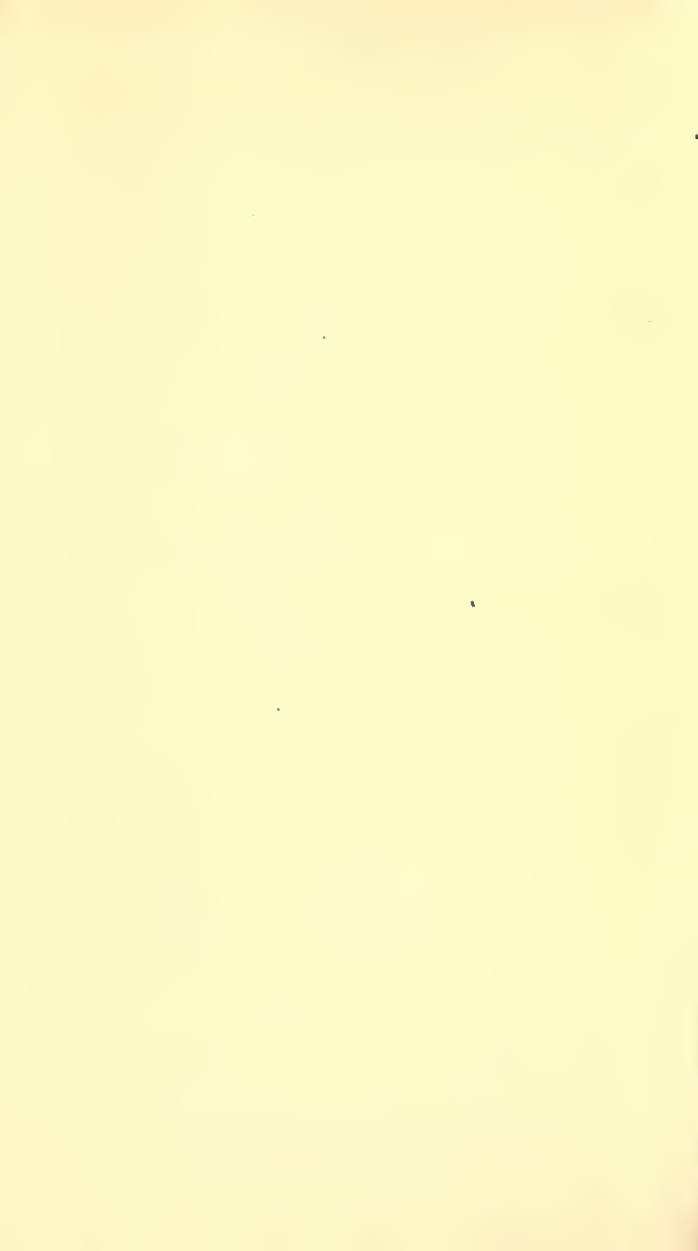
During that narrowing time of earthen days Peruel was an equal companion with the angels. Luke's soul walked as with God through the pleasaunces of Paradise.

Then, on the day of glad destiny, the angels, waiting to welcome him, kissed him and kissed him. His body had done its life business.

He was found in the grave; his eyes, almost closed by the swollen flesh, stared at the rafters. Two birds of black omen, disturbed, flew croaking from the doorway.

So Peruel found Heaven's gate, and was happy.





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